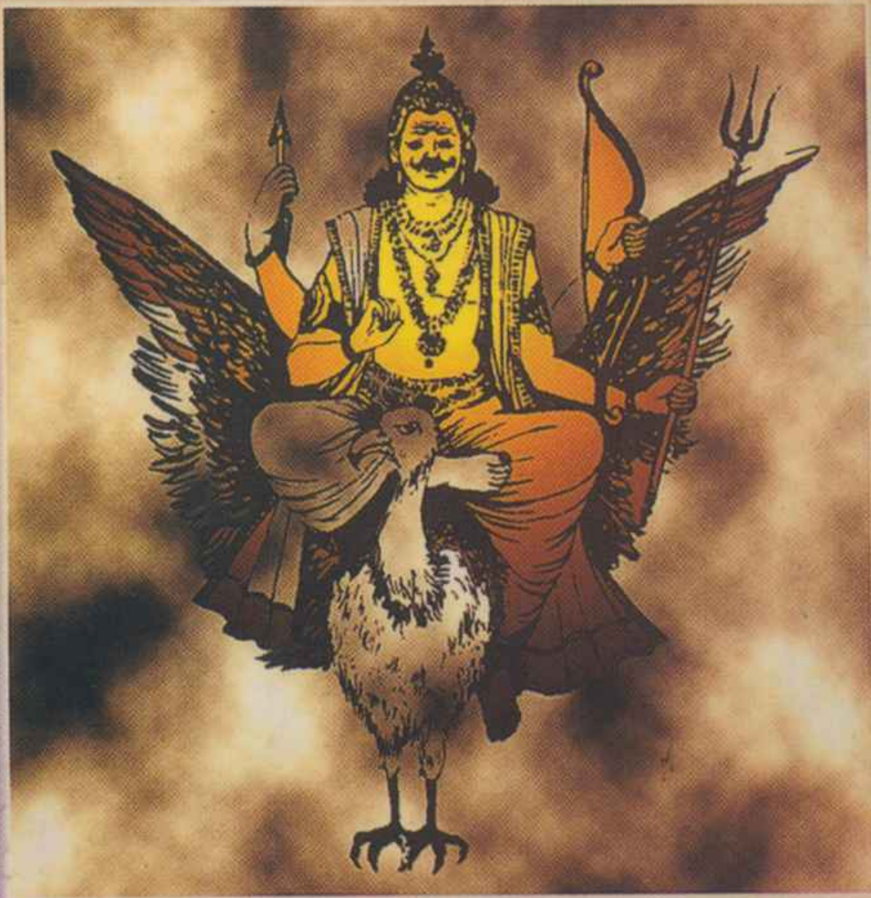
THE GREATNESS OF SATURN

A Therapeutic Mythic



Robert E. Svoboda

THE GREATNESS OF SATURN

THE GREATNESS OF SATURN

BY

DR. ROBERT E. SVOBODA

ILLUSTRATED BY RHONDA ROSE

Rupa . Co

Copyright © Robert Edwin Svoboda 1997

First published by
Sadhana Publication

First in Rupa Paperback 1998
Eighth Impression 2007

Published by
Rupa . Co
7/16, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi 110 002

Sales Centres:

Allahabad Bangalore Chandigarh Chennai
Hyderabad Jaipur Kathmandu
Kolkata Mumbai Pune

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the publishers.

ISBN-1-57178-032-7

Book illustrations and design by Rhonda Rose

Printed in India by
Gopsons Papers Ltd.
A-14 Sector 60
Noida 201 301

CONTENTS

Foreword vii
Preface ix

PURVAKARMA

Introduction 3

PRADHANAKARMA — THE GREATNESS OF SATURN

Chapter One: *King Vikrama Deliberates in his Court over Which of the Nine Planets is Superior* 25
Chapter Two: *The Sun* 29
Chapter Three: *The Moon* 39
Chapter Four: *Mars* 47
Chapter Five: *Mercury* 55
Chapter Six: *Jupiter* 67
Chapter Seven: *Venus* 73
Intermezzo: *The Debate* 79
Chapter Eight: *Saturn* 87

Chapter Nine: *Rahu and Ketu, The Lunar Nodes* 93
Chapter Ten: *The Begging of the Universe* 99
Chapter Eleven: *The Verdict* 105
Chapter Twelve: *The Beginning of the Seven and a Half Year Period of Saturn's Dominance of Vikramaditya's Life* 109
Chapter Thirteen: *King Vikrama is Falsely Accused of Theft, and is Put to Work on the Oil Mill* 117
Chapter Fourteen: *The Lifting of the Seven-and-a-Half and the Pleasing of Lord Saturn* 127
Chapter Fifteen: *Saturn's Stories of How He Administered Misery to his Guru and Others* 129
Chapter Sixteen: *King Vikrama Reveals his Identity* 147
Chapter Seventeen: *King Vikrama Returns to Ujjayini* 151

PASCHATKARMA

Deities, Seizers, and Remedies 155
Myth 197
Vrata Katha 227
The Greatness of Saturn 269

Appendix 273
Glossary and Pronunciation Guide 277
Bibliography 289

FOREWORD

Very few people alive today could have produced this book. Robert Svoboda is a trained Ayurvedic doctor, in fact the only Westerner ever to complete a full education in an Indian Ayurvedic medical college. His education and practice of Ayurveda have revealed to him a vast array of treatments for various maladies and preventive situations. Because Ayurveda, for the last few centuries at least, has been widely practiced in India in conjunction with astrology (jyotish), Dr. Svoboda has taken it on himself, as have many Indian Ayurvedic physicians, to master the esoteric and complicated elements of astrology. Both Ayurveda and Jyotish are used equally to treat and predict maladies; thus a natural congruence exists between them. Moreover, both are fortified by several millennia of vigorous intellectual history and scientific experimentation, leading to their widespread acceptance in India (and elsewhere) today, where they have successfully withstood the pressures imposed by Western scientific thought. In addition to his vast knowledge of Ayurveda, Jyotish, and their practical applications, Dr. Svoboda possesses a further qualification: He has a wonderful gift for languages and is highly conversant in Hindi, Gujarti, Maranthi, and Sanskrit. His knowledge is thus not second-hand, derived from poorly translated or overinterpreted accounts of Ayurveda, astrology, history, or mythology. He has studied the various astrological and mythological texts used in this book, most of them in Gujarati and Hindi, and is delivering the story of Shani (Saturn) in a composite account taken from many sources, for the first time to a Western audience.

In all systems of astrology Saturn has played a role disproportionate to the fact that it is only one of nine planets. In India, as in the West, Saturn—Shani in Sanskrit—has long been the harbinger of doom. Naturally it is in the best interest of every individual to prevent his own doom. This is why remembering Saturn's location in one's natal *horoscope and keeping track of its changing position in the sky relative to the various parts of one's horoscope—including houses, planets, and constellations—provide keys to arresting, or at least slowing down, Saturn's forces of doom. Keeping track of Saturn's movements is not enough, however; that would be like standing transfixed on a highway watching a truck speed toward you. Like stepping out of the way of the oncoming truck and experiencing perhaps only a moment's fear while being spun around by the wind in its wake, understanding Shani's power is a means in itself to avoiding its worst ravages. Understanding is power because it places an individual in a meaningful relationship with the object of understanding. And in meaningful relationships, influence works in both directions. In this case, not only does Shani influence one's actions and their outcome, but the individual can influence Saturn. This is effected by resorting to any of a number of strategies that have been evolved for refining one's relationship with Shani, who is regarded in India not as a collection of inert particles but as a very powerful living being with a definite personality.*

In India, where astrology is used nearly exclusively for predictive purposes, a great deal of thought has been expended on Shani's malefic possibilities and how to attenuate them. Dr. Svoboda has captured the essence of the problem by providing an easily readable narrative of India's best-known tale of Shani's ravages, those inflicted by Shani on the legendary king Vikramaditya. Dr. Svoboda has also provided a discussion of age-old strategies for modifying Shani's influence and their application today by people who have not much more than a nodding familiarity with Indian astrology or with Indian language and rituals. May this book illuminate Jyotish, self-healing, and Indian mythology for those who read it.

Frederick M. Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sanskrit and Classical Indian Religions
University of Iowa

PREFACE

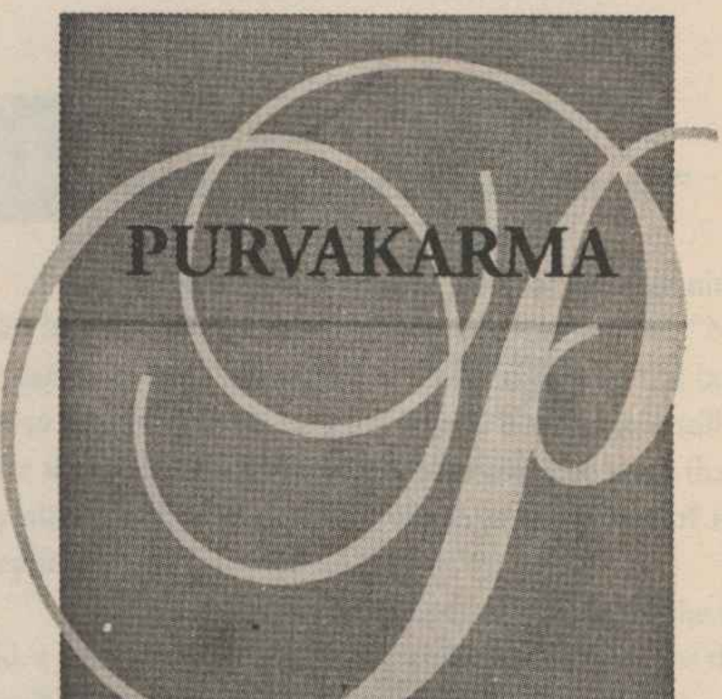
During the decade that I lived all but continuously in India my greatest fortune was to have spent eight of those years in the company of my mentor, the Aghori Vimalananda. He exposed me to a great deal of India's classical culture and to many living traditions, and taught me both how to appreciate and how to perform in the grand pageant that is India. When he introduced me to the Shani Mahatmya *("The Greatness of Saturn") it was a mid-morning in early 1980 just before Saturn was to begin afflicting my natal Moon. After this period of affliction ended in late 1987 I became inspired to translate the Shani Mahatmya into English, that the tale might live and work in a culture far distant in time, space, and sensibilities from that of its birth.*

My translation is taken from the Gujarati version of the Shani Mahatmya that was written by Pranjivan Harihar Shastri and published in the 1950s in Bombay by Natvarlal I. Desai. Though this version is now out of print, and the publisher has closed down, a Marathi rendition that is nearly identical, published by Jaya Hind

Prakashan of Bombay in 1990, remains freely available. The rendering is mine alone, with abundant translation assistance from Miss Roshni Panday, and commentary assistance from several people who read pieces of text, including Margaret Mahan, Rachel Meyer, and Claudia Welch. I have followed the text almost exactly, less a few anachronisms that have been excised and a few untranslatable puns that were regrettably eliminated. The English word 'pundit' has been used as an admittedly imperfect equivalent for the Sanskrit word pandita, *from which 'pundit' is derived, even though pandita carries a far broader sense of both erudition and intellectual rectitude than does 'pundit.'*

The most significant alteration that I made was to augment and garnish the remarkably perfunctory stories provided in the Gujarati text for the eight planets other than Saturn with stories from other sacred literature, that the text might be a salute fit for all Nine Planets. The enhanced story and its accompanying commentary were blended together with respect and devotion, and the resultant batter was then baked into what I hope will serve as a faithful representation of astrological reality. May the result fill its readers with such a pure and positive bhava *("state of being") that the truth of this subject will appear evident to their hearts as well as to their minds, and may the Nine Planets, and Lord Saturn in particular, be pleased with the result!*

Many thanks to many people, in particular to Miss Roshni Panday for her help with the translations, to Ms. Rhonda Rose for her illustrations and design work, to Dr. Fred Smith for his trenchant comments, and to Mr. Hart de Fouw for his many invaluable contributions. Profound thanks to my mentor, Vimalananda, and to my Jyotish guru, the redoubtable Mantriji. Reverential thanks to Lord Saturn for consenting to make all this possible.



PURVAKARMA

INTRODUCTION

Now begins "The Greatness of Saturn."

You can know, when you see "now" at the beginning of an Indian legend, that the tale to follow is *living wisdom.* "Now" in this position means "whenever it is that you pick up this book and begin to read it." Each time a live legend is retold it is still "now," for live stories live in a world whose time does not 'pass': that world of symbolic, subjective, reality which is the world of internal perception.

All of us can generally agree on the reality of the external world; a mango looks, feels, smells, and tastes more or less the same to any human. Once the mango enters you, though, your internal experience of it becomes unique to you. The great sages of ancient India knew well that the emotions and thoughts created within us as a result of our interactions with the outer environment are the matter of which the 'internal cosmos' is made. Though less solid, and therefore subtler, than the matter of the material world, things made of subtle matter are often more real, and more permanent, than are things composed of dense matter. We all know how powerful thoughts can be; though thought has minimal 'reality' in the physical universe, it is the cause of most of the physical activity that happens there. Our thoughts and emotions are regularly transformed into our physical realities, and our physical conditions generate our emotional and psychological states.

A living story is born when living wisdom incarnates in the subtle matter of a human consciousness. Every writer of fiction knows how at some point during the writing of a story the characters come to life and begin to direct succeeding plot twists. When the characters of a mundane book written by a single author can take on lives of their own, how much more dynamic must mythic gods, seers and heroes be, who have been the focus of concentration for millions of people over thousands of years? Living tales live out their lives symbiotically within human beings, preserved through regular infusions of human life force, feeding on our powers of attention as they nourish our spiritual marrow. To read or listen to vigorous stories is to nourish and rejuvenate them; to make them your own is to host them; to tell them to others is to propagate them. Living stories live within us just so long as we serve as their honest vehicles, delivering their wisdom as best they can to those who need and deserve it. Like wealth, food, knowledge, and children, stories must circulate, that they may be transferred from generation to generation, one storyteller to the next, in a continuous lineage. A story dies out whose last hearer dies without having ever told it, like any other species of being lapses when its last member expires without reproducing.

If living wisdom is good metaphysical food, which nourishes and heals its hearers, dead knowledge is mere dead weight, which can accumulate within you until it must either be expelled or kill you. Inanimate knowledge's subtle substance literally weighs you down; it makes you "heavy-hearted." Living wisdom "enlightens" you, literally, by lightening you of the burden of his noxious baggage. Dead knowledge can sometimes provide intellectual satisfaction to its knower, but too often it becomes a terrible encumbrance of which its owner must be purged. A.K. Ramanujan, who spent most of his life among living folktales, tells the story of the old woman who got fatter and fatter, no matter how little she ate, as her tribulations mounted. When finally she broke down and told all her miseries to the walls of a deserted house, those walls collapsed under the anguish in her words — and she miraculously became thin again, there and then. There was also the barber who laughed uncontrollably at the foibles of his clients. When he could no longer restrain these secrets he told them to the trees — but the trees couldn't hold onto them either, and blurted out the news in rhythm after their wood was made into drums.

Living wisdom lives because it contains a kernel of Truth, a fragment of the Real Reality, which can be transmitted to whoever is open and alert enough to receive it. Real music, real verse, and real stories have an innate power to teach, to heal, and to induce mystical experiences. Like "real poetry," which Robert Graves said causes its listeners' hair to stand on end, live-wire myth shocks you when you grab hold of it. A real tale grips you hard and never lets go. The *Shani Mahatmya* ("Greatness of Saturn") is one such living story. As you enter into its domain you should know that some of its constituent tales have been told over and over for thousands and thousands of years, for hundreds of generations, in unbroken succession. Like other stories which are 'alive' it can, if you let it, take you to that primordial mythic "now" where it exists.

The Decay of Western Myth

Most people nowadays exist in the external "now," where they are inundated with dead knowledge: piles and piles of doornail-like disjointed facts, speculations, opinions, and distortions. Knowledge has become just one more commodity of commerce, the fuel we burn on the information superhighway. The symbols which live in your internal reality do not simply stand for external things, they *are* your internal manifestations of those outer things. If you have no living symbols within you, you are dead inside even if you seem active from without, like a pithed frog, or a tooth with a root canal. Today the whole of the modern world is deep in the throes of what has been called a "pathology of the symbol." The concept of the "sacred" has been effectively extirpated from our world view, a paradigm in which all is more or less equally profane. Any talk of "internal reality" invites ridicule or peremptory dismissal from that majority of our fellow citizens who dwell exclusively in the external world of the mundane. All our central mythic symbols are dying or dead, and can no longer nourish, inspire, and protect us. Some people compensate by revering with a near-religious sanctity their birthplaces, homes, sports teams, countries' flags, and social institutions —

some even become devotees of the cult of Elvis — but these ersatz symbols are so removed from the world of natural reality that very few of them ever succeed in coming to life. Our innate need for living symbols impels us to generate these fantasy reflections of living mythical realities that are these transient myths. But such shadows rarely reveal anything of how we came to be, nor do they effectively elucidate any path toward any superior reality. Because they cannot translate themselves from mundane time and space into the "paradigmatic" time and space of myth, synthetic legends can only temporarily replace the central mythic symbols that we are losing, in the same way that drugs and other addictions only temporarily provide us with feelings of well-being.

Though modern myths enjoy nothing more than the temporary, illusory sort of life that a disease possesses, they are sufficiently hardy to make their believers believe that they are sufficient. Worse, the vast majority of modern people uncritically open themselves day after day to deleterious patho-myths, images which take on a perverted life within us and pursue their own agendas, unconcerned for our well-being. Legions of well-funded, well-engineered death-dealing pseudomyths in our popular culture surround us like hungry vultures, waiting patiently to feed on the weak and impressionable. Many are the young women who turn anorexic or bulimic after imbibing the "thinness is beauty" patho-myth, and the young men who stalk and kill one another because they buy into the "violence is masculinity" patho-myth. Day after day, around the world, groups of young soldiers who have been tutored by their various elders in the "tribe is in danger" fantasy slaughter one another bravely and pitilessly, alternately instigated and mourned by their fellow citizens who genuflect before the monolith of jingoistic honor. Billions today live for nothing more noble in life than their own indulgence, spurred into ever-increasing self-gratification by the "consumption is happiness" fiction.

Perhaps the most pernicious modern mythical non-myth is the falsehood, perpetrated principally by materialist scientists and "rationalists," that our society has now gone beyond myth. To deny that you are affected by any sorts of myths, pathological or wholesome, increases the likelihood that you will be wholly ruled by them. Though anthropologists like Joseph Campbell were concerned that parents should not imprint on their kids outdated or dead "affect images" (images which affect us directly, not through thought), we are now raising a generation who has no affect images whatsoever, except those of sex and violence; children who know no world other than the virtual world of television, technopop, video games, and the Internet. People have begun to jump enthusiastically out of their flesh and into the Net, sacrificing a humanness they have never been taught to explore for the opportunity to drown in the electronic artifice of *alt.reality.* Campbell presciently warned of the dangers of taking the existence of our supporting social order for granted. The rush to establish individual rights and rewards as preeminent, to the neglect of social values and responsibilities, has already begun to have very serious consequences for the continuance of our very civilization.

Living, multivalent myth remains the most effective protection and treatment we have when our affect images slip and fall, providing us with wholesome conceptual nutrition, and inoculating us effectively against the ideo-pathogens which are everpresent in today's environment. Wise use of the traditions we have inherited from our forebears could provide us with these images, but the current Western world view is too rigid, and our iconoclasm too institutionalized, to admit of such possibilities. Even in those realms of modern study, such as the psychology of archetypes, where myths are still admitted, they are often welcomed only after they have been objectified into powerlessness. Gone from our world view is myth's ability to penetrate into the real, indescribable nature of things; missing is that state of myth-induced being which is living wisdom. In opening ourselves to the modern, we have closed ourselves to the ancient, and until a hole is cut in this wall we will remain immured outside ourselves, sequestered away from the durable continuity of that vision of Reality that those who came before us toiled so seduously to bequeath to us intact.

Sincere prayer could save us, but most of us in these days have come to doubt that prayer can change things, for we no longer think of Nature as a living being who can be requested to show us Her compassion. This concept went out of fashion in the culture of the West on the day when the Greek philosophers of old openly declared that they no longer knew how to interpret their most ancient writings, rites, and symbols. Instead of turning inward to find those fleeing significations, these savants turned their minds outwards, in one-pointed contemplation of the universe of manifestation, and decided to accept as real only that part of the nature that we can hear, touch, see, taste, and smell. This made it easy to reject as illogical even the possibility that there might be such a thing as live mythology, and to conclude that all gods are simply inflated memories of illustrious men and women. Once the essence of these Greek myths had been lost they decayed from living wisdom into lifelike allegories, and then into fables about which everyone could believe what they pleased: nerveless myths which appear to live even after their deaths.

The demythicization and desacralization of our society have been accelerated by the liberal application of that peculiarly-modern fancy that progress must be linear. This posture, which assumes the new to be always superior to the old, grows logically out of the Western preference for linear thought. The doctrine of linear progress forbids ancient wisdom to enter into modernity, mandating that new and different reality forms must inevitably supplant and replace all older models. From the superficial standpoint this is often true, for myths continually evolve new ways to express their messages, ways which are fit for the new conditions in which these myths are continually finding themselves. But myths do not jettison their old messages in order to load new ones (as, for instance "liberation theologians" have been trying to bend Christian myth into doing); instead, living myths develop new ways of transmitting the same, eternal message.

Therapeutic Myth

Even as our current diseased world view continues to spread like a cancer, some among us have begun to cast about for replacements for our moribund symbols. Many of those who enter into such interior searches do so too lightly, through unwise shortcut practices like trance channeling, without understanding the dangers posed to their personalities. Others advocate a wholesale return to

Western Christian mores, which is, however, neither likely nor feasible, for the cultural components which created those mores have evolved into forms and expressions that are incompatible with those archaic values. One possible solution is to borrow traditions from cultures which have retained theirs, for globalization now permits wide-ranging cultural exchange in hitherto impermissible directions; but, lamentably, not all traditional cultures are still viable. The dispose-all culture which originated in the West and has now gone planetary inveigles traditional societies to discard the outmoded beliefs which comprise their living wisdom. At its best this "new" culture encourages only the retention of the dead knowledge of external rituals, divorced from that spark which keeps myths alive. At its worst it prohibits even that masquerade, though in truth reviving the outer form of a sacred dance without also resurrecting its underlying living wisdom does little to increase cultural vitality, however many may be the tourists it attracts. Our own culture seems well on the way to secularizing all our previously sacred observances — see what we have done to Mardi Gras and to Christmas.

Myth transplantation need not be performed by masterminding mass conversions from our culture to another, or by accepting all living alien traditions uncritically. All traditions are not equally worthy of revival; the Aztec tradition and its hunger for human sacrifice, for example, is one heritage which should most likely remain dead and buried. Let us instead open ourselves to healthy, life-enhancing traditions, activities which may help us to revive ourselves. The human race still maintains a heritage of healthy culture-vines which have sprung from our shared mytho-compost heap, shoots which have been growing vigorously for umpteen years now, whose berries are particularly flavorful and potent. Mythic Nature's urge to preserve and develop strands of living wisdom is as urgent as material Nature's urge to maximize the survival, and recombination, of physical DNA. Just as the flora and fauna of one continent can often be naturalized in an alien land, myths which originated in other cultures can be transported to faraway places and interbred with local tales to form unpredictably expressive hybrids, some of which will flourish. Though they may not restore to us what we have lost, some of these wisdom-shoots may graft successfully onto our collective myth-trunk, and provide us some tasty cultural fruit.

One potential source for such grafts is India, for part of India's genius is its ability to connect many sometimes-contradictory aspects of "what is" into a single multidimensional substance. Most of India's major myths are equipped to convey cosmological data, archetypal material, cultural and social taboos, medical information, and spiritual and mystical matters to anyone who knows how to access it. Even if you do not fully understand them, therapeutic myths like "The Greatness of Saturn" can provide a sovereign remedy for pathological myth's harmful follies, provided that you let these medications inside you, under your "skin."

Myth cannot speak to a soul from which it is barred by intellectual overanalysis. Intellectualizing your experience of a myth may be superficially therapeutic by providing you some transitory calming and reassurance, but these effects will penetrate your consciousness no further than your conscious mind. Only when you dare to immerse yourself in a myth's reality can the myth return you to its source, a territory in which the secret of your re-integration may lie concealed. Just as you would not try to interpret a dream before you dream it, you ought not try to explore your experience of a therapeutic image before you let that image penetrate deeply into your being and you allow it to show you how it can speak to you. Sensation precedes interpretation in the natural order of things; a beginner's mind is a good mind for myth, for the less you know, the better you can be penetrated. When you lower your sophistication defenses and open yourself to the tale, like a child opens itself innocently to the wonders in its world, the myth can enter you. You cannot be in control if you want the tale to do its work; you must surrender to it, as King Vikramaditya, our tale's protagonist, was forced to do. When you can learn how to let go of yourself, the universe itself can become your teacher.

Since most of us have been trained to value only those experiences which are comprehensible to the conscious mind, we fear all else, for whenever the mind is called upon to relinquish control and prominence it feels threatened. Assuage its fear by moving slowly with your surrender. Become a deer in a forest, and transform the story into an ascetic who has moved in nearby. Approach the tale cautiously, ready to flee at any sign of hostility. Give your intellect ample time to surrender a portion of its domain to your intuition, for you cannot decree innocence into being within you. When you see that the tale's heart is limpid through and through, and that its tenderness and compassion are boundless, you can safely lay your head in its lap. Integrate each perception as it occurs, and you will find yourself instinctively drawn into the story without the need for any maneuvering of your own. Lowering your defenses is safe to do only after you have become sure that you are not opening yourself to invasion from cultic forces. Then you can be confident that the story of Saturn will not overwhelm you with astrological superstition, or make you rush zombie-like to your checkbook to make uncontrollable donations to unspeakable causes.

A life-enhancing tale like "The Greatness of Saturn" injects healthy images of self, of the cosmos, and of the relationship which exists between the two into the deepest layers of being of those who open themselves to it. When you read, recite, or hear it, listen carefully for the wholeness, the seamless vista of existence, that it engenders within you. While good doctors and astrologers everywhere conscript narrative into the service of their therapies, the stories that *Ayurveda* (traditional Indian medicine) and *Jyotish* (traditional Indian astrology) favor help particularly in recreating holistic perspective in someone whose awareness of reality has been truncated into one-dimensionality. Wholeness will manifest within you, and your life, once you own a deeply-held image of life's wholeness in your own organism and in your environment.

Jyotish

For now, instead of conjecturing over who Saturn is and why he is so consequential, please simply let his myth work on you, for Saturn will affect you whether you know him or not. Know, however, that Saturn is the most important player in the systemization of Reality known as Jyotish, which is India's astrology. More than a mere mathematic regularization of divinatory schemes, Jyotish is itself a living narrative which weaves together the lives that its interpretations and predictions touch. Jyotish began as a *Vedanga,* a subsidiary body of knowledge which was needed to make proper use of the *Vedas,* India's four ancient sacred book-length accumulations of living wisdom. Since the last standardization of the Vedas, dozens of centuries ago, these hymns have been flawlessly preserved, syllable for syllable and word for word, by their priestly keepers.

The hymns of the Vedas were not composed by humans; they were perceived, or 'seen,' as embodiments of Reality by inspired Seers known as *rishis.* India has taught from time immemorial that the only true 'thing' that exists in the universe, the 'thing' which is present before creation, animates all created beings so long as the cosmos exists, and remains after the end of the manifested universe, is that homogenous Spirit which is beyond time, space, and causation. This Soul of All, which is often known as *paramatma* or *purusa,* is the Absolute, Universal Reality, the unqualified and unlimited base actuality from which all other realities pour. Within it all potentialities exist, and from it all knowledge flows. The Vedic hymns are inspired expressions of this Absolute Reality as 'seen' by the rishis, and from these Vedas all of India's *vidyas* (forms of living wisdom, including Ayurveda and Jyotish) have sprung. Each vidya is a goddess, a muse who must be patiently and tirelessly worshipped until a personal relationship between the student and the vidya develops, a mutual relationship in which the one possesses the other. Then the veil lifts and the understanding becomes clear. Only when you are possessed by the muse can you possess the wisdom.

Jyotish is a type of *sadhana* (spiritual practice), a method for comprehending the *Jyotir Vidya* (the "Lore of Light") and, ultimately, the Universal Reality, through the medium of the Nine Planets.

Planetary myth forms an important part of this sadhana. Most of us 'know' that nine planets — Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto — circle our sun. Though it is true that from the sun's point of view that Earth moves around the sun, it is also true that from Earth's point of view, from what we see in the sky, the sun moves around the earth. The famous physicist Ernst Mach once contended that there are no physical grounds on which to argue that the earth is rotating around the sun, since relativity of motion equally well allows us to say that the universe is rotating around the earth. We can choose whichever viewpoint is most convenient and useful for our purposes. Since as students of astrological myth we are more interested in how the planets affect us and not in how we affect them (even though we do affect them), it is most convenient and useful for us to look at the sky from our human, earth-centered frame of reference. From Earth five planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn — are visible to the naked eye. Taken together with the two luminaries — the sun and moon, one of which seems to revolve around the earth and the other of which actually does so — we have the seven 'planets' which were recognized by almost the whole of the ancient civilized world from at least 1500 B.C.

Each of these 'planets' rules one of the days of the week:

Sunday = ruled by the Sun
Monday = ruled by the Moon
Tuesday = ruled by Mars
Wednesday = ruled by Mercury
Thursday = ruled by Jupiter
Friday = ruled by Venus
Saturday = ruled by Saturn

Though the seven-day week may or may not have been used in Vedic times in India, at some point it was cordially welcomed into Jyotish. Seven being numerologically important (seven notes of the musical scale, seven colors in a rainbow, and Revelation's Seven Seals, among other significations), seven planets sufficed astrologers for centuries. Then, at least fifteen hundred years ago, two new heavenly 'bodies' were 'planetized' in India, one after another. These were Rahu and Ketu, the two lunar nodes, which are the points in the sky where the plane of the moon's orbit around Earth and the plane of the ecliptic (the plane of the earth's orbit around the sun) intersect. Though they are neither visible nor corporeal, these nodes, which are the points where eclipses occur, influence us on Earth nonetheless. The addition of Rahu and Ketu raised the number of 'planets' to nine: the seven colors of the rainbow, sandwiched between the invisible-to-the-human-eye infrared and ultraviolet. Nine being also the number of single-digit integers in our base 10 calculating system, the Nine Planets represent, in numerological terms, the totality of possibilities in our universe.

Over the course of the centuries Indian astrologers have learned that, mythologically, the greatest, the most powerful, and the most dangerous of all the Nine Planets is Saturn, and they have invested considerable time and effort in studying ways in which to keep the consequences of Saturn's influence on us under control. One of the methods they developed for remedying Saturn's ill-effects is the living myth we call "The Greatness of Saturn," whose text you are now beginning in what is your current personal "now."

How to use "The Greatness of Saturn"

If you want "The Greatness of Saturn" to act therapeutically for you, you will have to create for yourself a sacred space and time in which to use it. Saturn lives in mythic time and space, and you will have to visit him there if you wish to approach him. This you can accomplish only when you can temporarily divorce yourself from external space and time. When necessary you can make use of someone else's consecrated area, such as that of a church or a temple, but it is best to have your own personal sacred space, for what is holy for you may not be for someone else. You can create such a space anywhere in your house (even, perhaps, in your bathroom), provided that that place is quiet. Size is not a criterion; even a corner of a room can suffice, if it is tranquil. Remove everything from this corner that might remind your mind of your quotidian existence, and place there objects — a candle, a lamp, or a bell, perhaps — which are holy for you. As you sit, week after week, in that one spot to meditate and pray, the peaceable vibrations you create will permeate that space. If you are consistent with your practice in that location, a time will come when you will begin to feel calm and centered simply by sitting there.

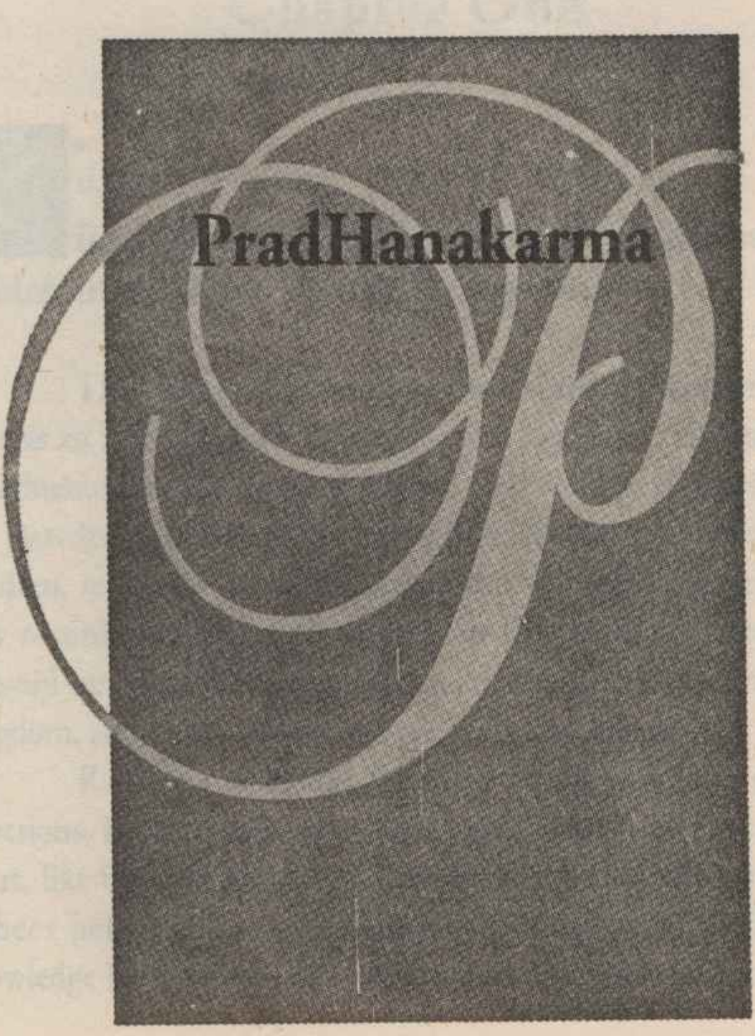
To enter into sacred time, select a time of day or night when no one is likely to disturb you, and sit in your space insulated from all mundane influences (e.g., turn off the radio and the TV; unplug the phone, or turn off its ringer, or turn on the answering machine; and put a note on the door, if need be). Try to sit to read each time at the same time of day, preferably facing the same direction each time. If possible, bathe just before reading; if not, at least wash your hands, feet, and face. Light a candle, or better yet a lamp that burns vegetable oil or ghee (clarified butter). Release some fragrance into the room, preferably via incense. If flowers are available, offer one or more. When you sit down, place a small amount of something sweet in front of you. This will absorb some of the vibrations you generate as you read or hear, and when you consume it at the end of your reading those vibrations will be carried deep into your tissues, where they will slowly work to transform your consciousness.

Sound is important. A word's sound forms that significant portion of its meaning which is beyond the pale of the conscious mind. Intellectualizing, by reducing words to consciously controllable forms, destroys the vibrations of deep meaning which vocalized words broadcast to their listeners. Those who have ears are well advised, then, to hear this story, either by listening to a storyteller tell it, or by telling it yourself to someone else. Even when you read it silently, read as if you were reading it aloud. Pay attention to all the words, even the names, without trying to remember them all, but trying to sound them out, with the help of the Pronunciation Guide. Intellectual analysis can come later, after you first experience the tale in its fullness. Enter into it, and allow it to enter into you.

Working with a therapeutic story is much like working with other traditional therapeutic processes, including both the Native American sweat lodge and the set of Ayurvedic purification practices known collectively as *panchakarma.* First comes the preliminary stage in the process (in Sanskrit, *purvakarma*), during which you prepare yourself for the experience. Then comes the experience itself (*pradhanakarma*), during which some sort of catharsis should occur. Ayurvedic purification is probably more likely to produce physical catharsis than is reading "The Greatness of Saturn," which is more likely to produce emotional and spiritual catharsis, but some cathartic purification will transpire during this stage, if you have been properly prepared for it. Finally comes the stage of *paschatkarma,* during which your reintegration and rejuvenation occur. This book is similarly divided into three portions. The introduction will help prepare you for the experience of reading the story, which occupies the middle portion; the book's final part will help you understand what you have read, and how to make best use of it.

Anyone who takes on a story takes on the responsibility of passing it on. The book you hold in your hands is the way I thought to pass on this particular sacred narrative. Ramanujan wrote in the preface to his book *Folktales from India*: "Stories and words not only have weight; they also have wills and rages, and they can take different shapes and exact revenge against a person who doesn't tell them and release them into the world. . . . They are there before any particular teller tells them; they hate it when they are not passed on to others, for they can come into being again and again only in that act of translation. A book such as this is motivated by such a need. If you know a tale, you owe it not only to others but to the tale itself to tell it; otherwise it suffocates. . . . Traditions have to be kept in good repair, transmitted, or else, beware, such tales seem to say, things will happen to you. You can't hoard them." (Ramanujan 1991, pp. xxx - xxxi) He tells of the Gond tribal who possessed four stories which he was too lazy to repeat. One night, when the Gond was fast asleep, the stories emerged from his belly, sat on the snoring lout, and conspired together to kill him because he refused to tell them to anyone. The Gond survived only because his servant, who wanted the stories for himself, overheard the plot and was able to thwart each assassination attempt as it occurred. In another case, a song a woman never sang and a story she never told came forth from her mouth while she slept and metamorphosed into a man's coat and a pair of shoes, items which sent her husband into a fury of jealousy.

While all living stories are clearly not benign, "The Greatness of Saturn" is a wholly good spirit, an angel of mercy who dispenses aid and comfort to all comers impartially. Some might call it chance that you selected this book to read; I believe instead that it selected you, that you and it were destined to meet, as it were. It and I have been close ever since our first meeting, in Bombay in 1980. My motives are both selfish, for I hope to make Saturn happy by this action, and altruistic, for I hope that others can similarly use it to make their own lives happy by pleasing Saturn. True lovers of mythic reality cannot remain aloof from the wisdom they carry; they always write and speak of their beloved with love and affection, and they love to share the good word with other like-minded people. You who read this story may not elect to make it part of yourself, as I have, for that will require you to feed it with your blood. Perhaps you are only curious about it, or maybe you want only to use it to help you relieve your misery. I think you will find it especially useful when you are in trouble. Whatever may be your purpose, please make adequate sacred space, time and attitude for it, and then surrender to it. Get out of its way, with no concern for what might happen next. The more you open yourself to this particular sacred narrative, the deeper it will penetrate into you, and the more profoundly it will be able to enrich your life.



PradHanakarma

Om Sham Shri Shanaishcharaya Namaha

Chapter One

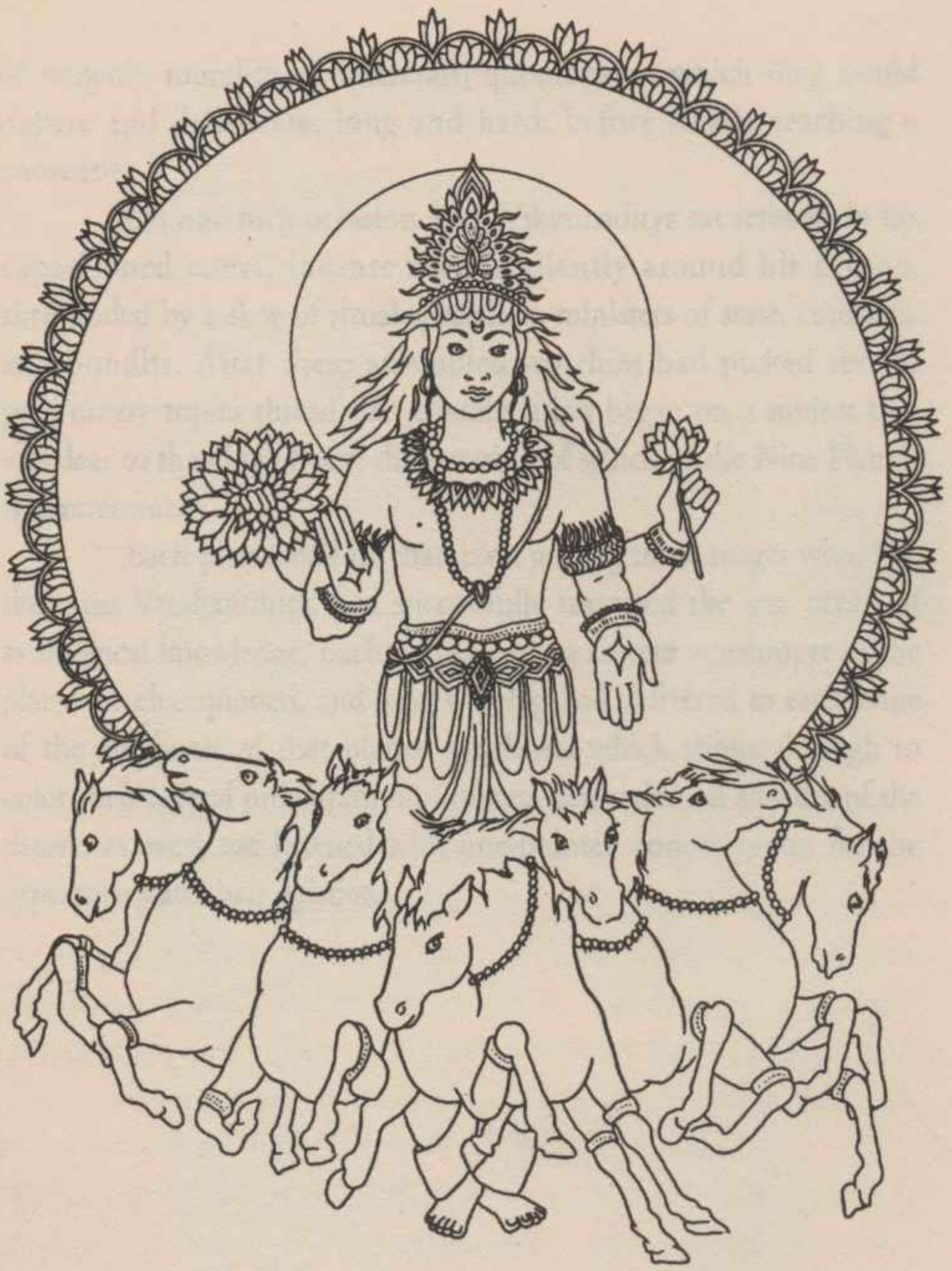
King Vikrama Deliberates in his Court over Which of the Nine Planets is Superior

The Heroic Vikramaditya once ruled the city of Ujjayini. He was an intellectual philanthropist of a king who clung tenaciously to righteousness and was ever anxious to relieve his subjects' miseries. He guarded his citizens as carefully as if they had been his own children, and they in turn regarded him with the same respect that they accorded to their own fathers. So long as King Vikrama ruled Ujjayini uprightness and good conduct permeated every corner of his kingdom, and every resident was righteous and happy.

Radiating as he did the luster of the guardians of the ten directions, King Vikrama drew all the greatest minds of the age to his court, like bees are drawn to a particularly nectarian flower. And just as bees help a plant to multiply, the king multiplied his own knowledge by drawing these experts into discussion on thorny issues of religion, morality, or statecraft, questions on which they would debate and deliberate, long and hard, before finally reaching a consensus.

On one such occasion King Vikramaditya sat serenely in his caparisoned court, incense coiling silently around his throne, surrounded by a slew of ritual specialists, ministers of state, courtiers, and pundits. After these assembled worthies had picked several preliminary topics threadbare, confabulation began on a subject that was dear to the king's heart: the question of which of the Nine Planets is paramount.

Each planet had its champion among those mages who, like the great Varahamihira, had successfully traversed the vast ocean of astrological knowledge. Each partisan was a sincere worshipper of the planet he championed, and long worship had delivered to each some of the attributes of that planet, attributes which shone through to color their several presentations. Stillness descended on all sides of the throne as every ear listened with one-pointed concentration for the experts to state their opinions.



Sun ○ **सूर्य**

Chapter Two

The Sun

The Sun's champion began the competition, for the Sun is the brightest of the planets. This pundit's leonine mane framed a broad, confident face which shone like Sol himself. Dignity, power, and authority flowed from his steady burning eyes to complement his regal bearing as his authoritarian, modestly-arrogant voice boomed out into the hall: "The Sun is superior among all the planets, and he becomes pleased with whoever reveres him consistently. Among the planets he is God incarnate in solar form. Those who regularly and devotedly remember the Sun lose all their worries, disease, and poverty, for unwavering worship of the Sun destroys all obstructions and fulfills all cherished desires.

"The Sun has sparse, curly hair, an incisive mind, a prominent appearance, a majestic voice, and is not very tall. His eyes are honey-colored and as bright as wine, and his bones are sturdy. He has a Pitta constitution. He is courageous and steady; his complexion is coppery reddish or golden, and his feet are inconspicuous. He wears red flowers and saffron-colored clothes, and carries a red lotus in his hand. His metal is gold or copper, and his gem ruby. In the body he rules the bones.

"Everything originates from the Sun, for he is the soul of all. He is the king of the sky, the ruler of all that falls between the earth and the celestial regions. Lord of the east, the Sun rules both Sunday and the constellation Leo. He is the Cause of the Day, the Terrific Fiery-Rayed One, the Significator of World Bliss. He is called the Shiner, the Enlivener, the Generator, the Life-Giver, the Light-Maker, the Day-Causer, and He Whose Rays Are Piercingly Hot. The Haritas, the Sun's green horses, are the seven solar rays, which are the seven Vedic meters: Gayatri, Trishtup, Anushtup, Jagati, Pankti, Brihati, and Ushnik. There is no reckoning of time without the Sun, and without time there can be no poetic meters, no seasons, no rhythm in the world.

"The year is the wheel of the Sun's chariot. That wheel has twelve spokes, which are the twelve months. Each month, your majesty, has its own Deva, Apsaras, Rakshasa, Serpent, Yaksha, Rishi, and Gandharva. As an example, during the month of Jyestha (May-June) the Deva is Mitra, the Apsaras Menaka, the Rakshasa Paurusheya, the Serpent Takshaka, the Yaksha Rathasvana, the Rishi Atri, and the Gandharva is Haha. The Deva, Rishi, Gandharva and Apsaras all belong to the heavenly regions, while the Rakshasa, Serpent and Yaksha all exist on lower levels.

"Each *deva* is a divine being who occupies the Sun's mansion during that month and presides over the Sun then. These devas increase the Sun's superb splendor by means of their own splendor.

The *rishis* (seers) compose hymns with which to eulogize the Sun. The *gandharvas* (celestial musicians) and *apsarases* (celestial dancing damsels) serve the solar deity by means of song and dance, while the *yakshas* (demigods) and their attendants worship his rays. The serpents carry the Sun, and the *rakshasas* (protectors) follow him. From sunrise to sunset the Valakhilyas, the sixty thousand thumb-sized rishis, surround the Sun and lead him on. Contact with these rishis, gandharvas, apsarases, and the like modifies the Sun's brilliance each month according to their own power, penance, and virtues, so each month has its own qualities which cause the Sun, though one, to have twelve different forms, names, characteristics, and personalities.

"The twelve solar devas are the Twelve Adityas, the sons of Aditi. The Supreme Lord begat Brahma, the Creator, who begat the Rishi Marichi, who begat the Rishi Kashyapa. Kashyapa had thirteen wives, of whom one was Aditi, who was one of the sixty daughters of the Patriarch Daksha. The Twelve Adityas are Vivasvan, Aryama, Pushan, Tvashtri, Savitri, Bhaga, Dhata, Vidhata, Varuna, Mitra, Shakra, and Urukrama.

"Vivasvan ('the Shining One') had by his wife Samjna three children: a Progenitor (*manu*) called Vaivasvata, and the twins Yama and Yami. By Chaya this Vivasvan had three more offspring: the planet Saturn, the Progenitor Savarni, and the goddess Tapati. After Samjna took the form of a mare on Earth, she also bore the Sun the Ashvin twins, those gods who are never untrue. Vaivasvata, who acted as the Progenitor of the Seventh Epoch (*manvantara*) of this Day of the Creator (*kalpa*), the Epoch in which we live, had ten sons. Ikshvaku, the oldest of those ten sons, emerged from Vaivasvata's nose when he sneezed; it was Ikshvaku who founded the solar race of human kings. Lord Ramachandra, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, who was born on Earth to save the universe after the demon Ravana had usurped it, was a descendant of Ikshvaku. This solar dynasty ended with Brihadbala, who died in the war of the *Mahabharata*."

"How is it that Vivasvan first sired children from one wife, then from a second, and finally from the first again?" his majesty King Vikramaditya asked good-naturedly. "Tell us the whole story."

"Samjna," the pundit began, "the wife of Vivasvan, was the daughter of Tvashtri, the celestial architect who is also known as Vishvakarman ('Master Builder of the Cosmos'). Samjna ('mutual understanding, agreement') lived with her dazzling husband for many years, during which time she gave birth to the first three of her children: Vaivasvata, Yama and Yami. When her mate's intense heat became unbearable for her she created a substitute wife, in her exact form, by awakening her own shadow (*chaya*). She then proceeded to her father's house, where she complained to Tvashtri that life with the Sun was impossible due to his scorching rays. When Tvashtri dutifully advised told her to return to her husband she chose instead to become a mare on Earth, and in that equine form began to perform severe penance, subsisting on dry grass alone, that she might come to withstand her husband's effulgence.

"In the meanwhile Chaya, who was Samjna's shadow brought to life, bore Vivasvan three children: first Savarni, then Saturn, then Tapati. Though born from a shadow, these children were by no means ephemeral; Savarni is scheduled to become the Progenitor of the Eighth Epoch of this Day of the Creator, Tapati has become a river on Earth, and we shall soon hear of the greatness of the planet Saturn.

"Chaya loved her children more than she loved Samjna's children, which made Yama angry. One day, fed up with her partiality, he raised his legs as if to kick her. Even though he did not follow through on his kick, Chaya lost her temper, and cursed the boy that his legs would fall from his body.

"In terror Yama ran to his father, crying, 'Save me! Save me!' When the boy told the Sun of Chaya's curse the Sun hurriedly modified it by saying that worms would eat some of the flesh from Yama's feet, and that these worms would then fall to the earth, thereby fulfilling the curse. After thus saving his son's legs, and consoling Yama tenderly, Vivasvan began to suspect that the woman he had been living with was not his wife Samjna. Which mother, after all, would curse her own child? He therefore summoned Chaya, and demanded of her sternly, 'How is it that you do not look on all your children equally?' When he got no satisfactory response the Sun waxed wroth, and prepared to curse his wife's shadow. His fiery anger so frightened the shade that she told him everything, and he divorced her on the spot.

"Enraged, Vivasvan went to Tvashtri, who pacified him, explained Samjna's plight, and suggested a way out of the predicament. When that glorious orb agreed to the plan, Tvashtri strapped the Sun to his milling machine and ground away part of his intensity. From the portion of the Sun's splendor that Tvashtri removed that smith forged the discus of Vishnu the Preserver, the trident of Shiva the Destroyer, the aerial car used by Kubera, the god of wealth, and the spear wielded by Karttikeya, the generalissimo of the gods.

"Now attenuated, Vivasvan went looking for Samjna. When he found her on Earth in mare's form he took the form of a stallion, and approached her amorously. She turned away from this strange beast, trying to avoid him, since she did not recognize him. But his desire for her was great, and he pursued her, caught her, and discharged his semen into her mouth. She, fearing he was not her husband, evicted that sperm through her nose, and from that potent seed up sprang the Ashvin twins, whom the Vedas hail as the Never-Untrue.

"It is Samjna's son Yama who takes away the souls of those whose life span is at an end; he is the guardian of the southern direction. Because Yama once became a crow from fear of the demon-king Ravana, all crows are revered as servants of Yama. Nachiketas and Markandeya gained victory over death and became immortal by propitiating Yama. By her devotion Savitri forced Yama to bring her husband Satyavan back from the dead. I bow to this Yama, the lord of death," concluded the pundit nervously, hoping thereby to keep the ominous death god from his own life for as long as possible.

"I believe," said the king sagaciously, "that Karna was also a son of the Sun?"

"Yes, your majesty," replied the Sun's specialist, appreciatively. "The great warrior Karna ('ear'), who was the offspring of Lord Sun and the human maiden Kunti, was born wearing a pair of earrings and a bright breastplate. These, which were part of the flesh of his body, made him impervious to all weapons. When Lord Indra, the king of the gods, was worried that Karna might kill his own son Arjuna during the great war of the *Mahabharata*, Indra appeared before Karna and begged these divine ornaments from him. Karna ripped them from his body and gave them away, ignoring the pain, and heedless of the fact that now he had lost his invulnerability. Because of this unparalleled unselfishness Karna was hailed by Indra as a god among gift-givers.

"Like his son Karna, Lord Sun is himself a great giver. Once, when Arjuna and his brothers had been exiled to the forest, they had only deerskins and bark cloth to wear, and even lacked pots for their drinking water. Then Yuddhisthira, the eldest of the brothers, followed the instruction of his priest, and performed disciplined worship of the Sun. Through his devotions he obtained the Akshayapatra (the 'never-empty pot,' or Cornucopia), which fulfilled all his heart's desires; whatever he asked for, the pot would provide him.

"When he was a student Hanuman, the monkey-god who helped Lord Ramachandra in His fight against Ravana ('the Howler'), wanted to learn the Vedas and their subsidiary lores. Hanuman first approached Jupiter, the guru of the gods, who was not prepared to teach a monkey who jumped continually from spot to spot. Disappointed, Hanuman went to the Sun, who asked him, 'I am ever-moving; how shall I teach you?' Hanuman replied, 'I will also move ceaselessly, just in front of you.' And so he was able to learn, thanks to the magnanimity of the Sun.

"It is also thanks to Lord Sun that the Rishi Yajnavalkya obtained the White Yajur Veda. When the great Rishi Veda Vyasa, who divided the Veda into four portions, assigned various students to each part, the Yajus, a text mainly in prose, was imparted to Vaishampayana, who was Yajnavalkya's guru. On one occasion Vaishampayana, who had been annoyed by certain of Yajnavalkya's conceited words, said to his disciple, 'I've had enough of you, you guru-belittler. Begone! But before you leave, leave behind whatever you have learned from me.'

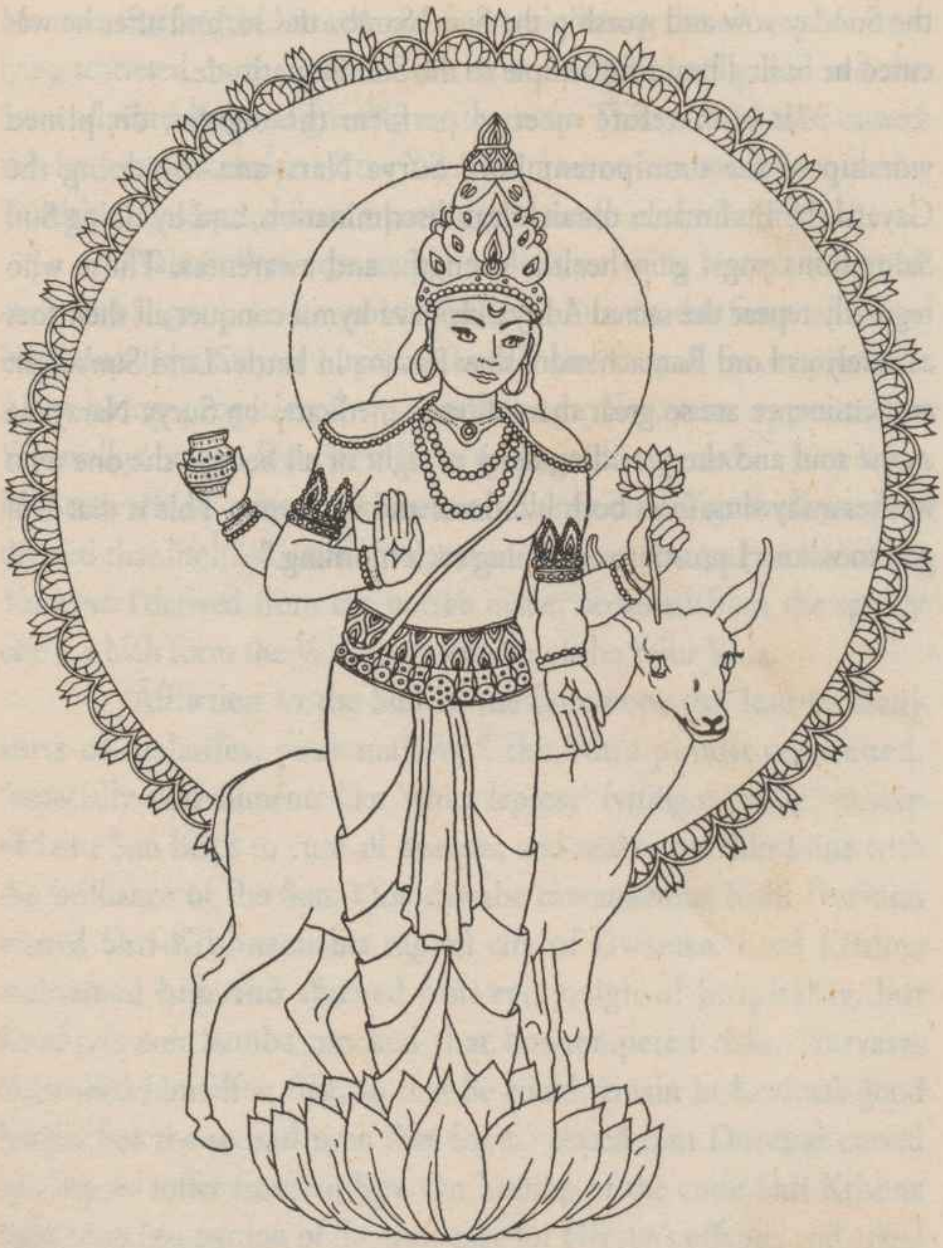
"Yajnavalkya then compliantly vomited up all the Yajus

Mantras that he had learned and departed. Seeing these Yajus Mantras lying scattered on the ground, the other disciples hastily assumed the form of partridges and greedily ate them up. This unusual feast caused this fetching rescension of the Yajus Mantras to become known as the Taittiriya ('descended from a partridge') branch of the Yajur Veda.

"Yajnavalkya now sought to discover Vedic hymns unknown even to his guru, so he worshipped the Sun in the form of Surya Narayana ('the Sun as Supreme Lord') and prayed for inspiration. After being propitiated the Lord Surya Narayana appeared to Yajnavalkya in the form of a horse (*vaji*) and imparted to him Yajus Mantras which were unknown to anyone else. Yajnavalkya then divided that limitless mass of hymns into fifteen rescensions known as *Vajasanis* ('derived from the horse's mane, obtained from the speedy one'), which form the Vajasaneya branch of the Yajur Veda.

"Affliction to the Sun in the horoscope can lead to many sorts of maladies, your majesty," the Sun's pundit continued, "especially skin ailments like 'white leprosy' (vitiligo), while worship of Lord Sun helps to cure all diseases, and makes the skin shine with the brilliance of the Sun. One day the cantankerous Rishi Durvasas visited Shri Krishna at his capital city of Dwaraka. Lord Krishna welcomed him and showed him every sign of hospitality, but Krishna's son Samba mocked that hot-tempered rishi. Durvasas controlled himself at first, so that he could remain in Krishna's good books, but the second time that Samba teased him Durvasas cursed the boy to suffer from vitiligo. On hearing of the curse Shri Krishna hurried to beg pardon of the testy sage for His son's offense, and asked for a means of lifting the hex. Durvasas replied, 'Have the boy follow the Sunday vow and worship the Sun.' Samba did so, and after he was cured he built a beautiful temple to the Sun in gratitude.

"It is therefore meet to perform the regular, diciplined worship of the omnipotent Lord Surya Narayana. By doing the Gayatri the Brahmanas obtain clear discrimination, and by doing Sun Salutations yogis gain health, strength, and awareness. Those who regularly repeat the sacred Aditya Hridaya hymn conquer all their foes as surely as Lord Ramachandra slew Ravana in battle. Lord Sun's light and eminence are so great that whoever meditates on Surya Narayana as the soul and the presiding deity of sight of all beings, the one who washes away sins, loses both blindness and ignorance. This is that Sun god to whom I prostrate on arising each morning."



Moon □ चंद्र

Chapter Three

The Moon

As the Sun's champion concluded his remarks, the king led the court in murmuring appreciation for this masterful presentation. It then fell to the Moon's advocate to make his case for our sky's other luminary. This aesthete's eyes shone with stag-like loftiness in his sensitive, expressive, compelling face. He spoke with feeling: "Your opinion is no doubt sagacious, O Sun-worshipper, but the Moon's power is truly beyond conception.

"The Moon is the mind of all, the lord of the senses and the emotions, and those who worship him assiduously lose their diseases and become happy. Among the *nakshatras* (the lunar constellations of the Vedic zodiac) the Moon is God incarnate in lunar form, and his esteem is magnified because Shiva, the lord of Mount Kailas, wears the crescent Moon on His forehead. Some say that this makes the Moon a one-eighth incarnation of the exalted Lord Shiva.

"Lord of the night, the Moon schedules rituals and is a haven for the ancestors. Those who worship the gods and the ancestors, and drink Soma at Soma sacrifices, assuredly go to the Moon when they depart from this world. The Vedas declare that 'the Moon is none other than King Soma, the food of the gods.' Whenever a sacrifice is completed, the essence of its offerings goes up to the Moon. As the lord of plants and their growth, the Moon pours the nectar of Soma into the world's vegetation, that it may be nourished and that it may nourish others. The Moon is the master of the world's water, and rules the salty taste; he controls the tides, and stores and actuates the rain.

"The Moon shines with the dazzling whiteness of yogurt, conchshell or dew, and all foods grow due to his light. He is fair, youthful, fortunate, and watery, and his body waxes and wanes. Peaceable and auspicious in nature and appearance, he has a slim but round body with lovely limbs, and is intelligent, sweet and soft of speech, lovely-eyed, and wise. He wears white clothes and white flowers, his metal is bronze or silver, and his gem pearl. The Moon has a Kapha-Vata constitution, and tends to be fickle. He loves to wander, and is a Vaishya by nature. He rules the blood in the body, and because he is of the nature of semen he is passion-filled. Whoever seeks sexual satisfaction should worship the Moon.

"Lord of the northwest, of Monday, and of the constellation Cancer, the Moon is called the Golden-Gleaming Drop in the Sky (*Indu*), the Luminous (*Chandra*), the Night-Creator, the Cool-Rayed, the Snow-Maker, the Chief among Brahmanas, the Hare-Signed, Soma, Husband of the Nakshatras, and the Doe-Eyed. Because everyone loves him he is called Friend of the World. The Sun's Sushumna ray develops the Moon day by day during the half of the month that the Moon waxes and makes it complete on the day of the Full Moon. While the Sun's rays are scorching, the Moon's beams soothe, cool, and nourish. Thereafter, the gods drink Soma from the Moon during the dark half of the fortnight, while the forefathers drink that Soma on the New Moon day. The Moon, who is of the nature of Soma, was born from the tears of joy which flowed from Atri Rishi, a mind-born son of Brahma."

"Be so kind as to recount the story of Lord Moon's birth," requested the king, pleasantly.

"It is thanks to Anasuya ('non-spiteful'), the wondrous wife of Atri Rishi, that the Moon took birth in our world. The chief gods of the universe tried to test her purity by coming to her as guests and impudently demanding that she feed them naked. When thus challenged, that intelligent woman changed those puissant gods into tiny babies and, removing her own clothes, nursed them from her own breasts before returning them to adult status. Immensely pleased and impressed with Anasuya, these cosmic lords blessed her to enjoy unprecedented children. Thanks to Shiva's blessing the incredibly irascible Durvasas Rishi was born. Vishnu's blessing resulted in the birth of Dattatreya, that immortal being who is the first Aghori in the world.

"Brahma's boon caused the Moon's birth in this way: the Rishi Atri stood with his arms upraised without moving or even blinking for three thousand years. Then, when his body became thoroughly perfused with Soma, he himself became Soma, and rose up into the sky. The Soma juice filled him so full that he overflowed, and Soma oozed from his eyes, filling the heavens with luminosity. The goddesses of the ten directions gathered to receive that Soma into their collective womb, but they could not hold it for very long. The fetus then dropped to the ground and assumed the form of the Moon, whereupon Brahma placed him in a chariot. The Moon was then worshipped by all the celestials. He later married all twenty-seven nakshatras, beginning with Krittika, and this was almost his undoing," the pundit concluded suggestively.

"Please do explain," his majesty prompted, as if on cue.

"Although he had twenty-seven wives," the Moon's champion continued, "all of whom were sisters, the Moon preferred the one of them named Rohini, and remained always with her in her mansion. Anyone who looked up into the skies in those days would have seen the Moon forever full, each night, stationary in the sky in the constellation of Rohini.

"The Moon's other twenty-six wives were not at all pleased with this state of affairs, for they too wanted to enjoy regular sport with their husband, and they pleaded with him to visit each of them as well. When the Moon in his great infatuation ignored all their entreaties, they ran crying to their father, the Patriarch Daksha, who twice in high dudgeon warned his son-in-law to behave.

"On the third complaint Daksha lost his temper and cursed the Moon with consumption. Day by day he waned, losing his glow and his juice. No sacrifice could cure him. All the world's plants stopped growing, and soon, bereft of nourishment, all living things developed consumption. The celestials, alarmed at the possibility that all life on Earth would succumb to this wasting disease, then interceded for the Moon, and Daksha was mollified somewhat by this supplication. Daksha promised that dwindling globe that if he behaved himself he would be free of consumption for half of each month. Chastened, the Moon now waxes and wanes as he visits each wife once a month, for one day and one night at a time.

"We on Earth, O King," the pundit went on, grasping this opportunity to moralize, "must always remember this story of Lord Moon. When we play favorites with those we have sworn to regard with an equal eye, we open ourselves to malediction. Also, those who overindulge in sexual intercourse lay themselves open to the frightful malady of consumption, a malady which first appeared in the world on the occasion of Daksha's curse of the Moon."

"Is it not true," intruded King Vikrama, "that the Patriarch Daksha, the grandfather of the Twelve Adityas, had to suffer because of this reckless curse?"

"Indeed, O King," replied the expert. "Every action produces a reaction, as sure as night follows day. When Daksha dared to insult another of his sons-in-law, the omnipotent Lord Shiva, he lost his life, and was reborn only through the intercession of King Moon."

"Tell me how he came to be reborn," directed the king.

"The great King Prithu was the great-grandfather of ten sons who were known collectively as the Pracetases ('the mindful ones'). These boys acted and lived so similarly to one another that they were as if knit together. When their father commanded them to multiply they took recourse to the ocean, which is ruled by King Moon, to perform penance for ten thousand years. Their penance was so successful that they received the boon of a wife whose son's offspring would fill the earth.

"When the ten Pracetases emerged from the sea after succeeding at their long penance, they were infuriated to see how the earth's surface was utterly enshrouded by giant trees that seemed to rise up to the heavens themselves. Their rage emerged from their faces in the form of fire and wind, which began to incinerate those trees. Seeing the forests consumed, the Moon, in his role as ruler and therefore protector of the plants, had to step in and protect his subjects, the trees, when they were in such danger.

"When the Moon arrived on the scene he began to assuage the anger of the Pracetases, telling them, 'This wanton destruction of vegetation is going to obstruct you in your task of peopling the world. Besides, you are now the rulers of all, including the trees; how can you then destroy them? They are helpless; they cannot retaliate. Make peace with the trees that remain, so that you and they will both prosper, and then acccept as your wife this noble girl Lotus Eye, the daughter of the trees.'"

"The daughter of the trees?" queried King Vikrama.

"Lotus Eye, your majesty, was the daughter of the Rishi Kandu and the Apsaras Pramlocha ('to go down, sink'). Pramlocha dropped down to Earth from the celestial regions on a mission from Indra, the king of the gods, to disturb Kandu's austerities. She disturbed them so well that she soon became pregnant by him. After giving birth Pramlocha abandoned her baby girl and returned to heaven, and the baby was adopted and brought up by the tree-deities. When Lotus Eye would cry for milk Lord Moon, the king of vegetation, would let her suck Soma from his finger.

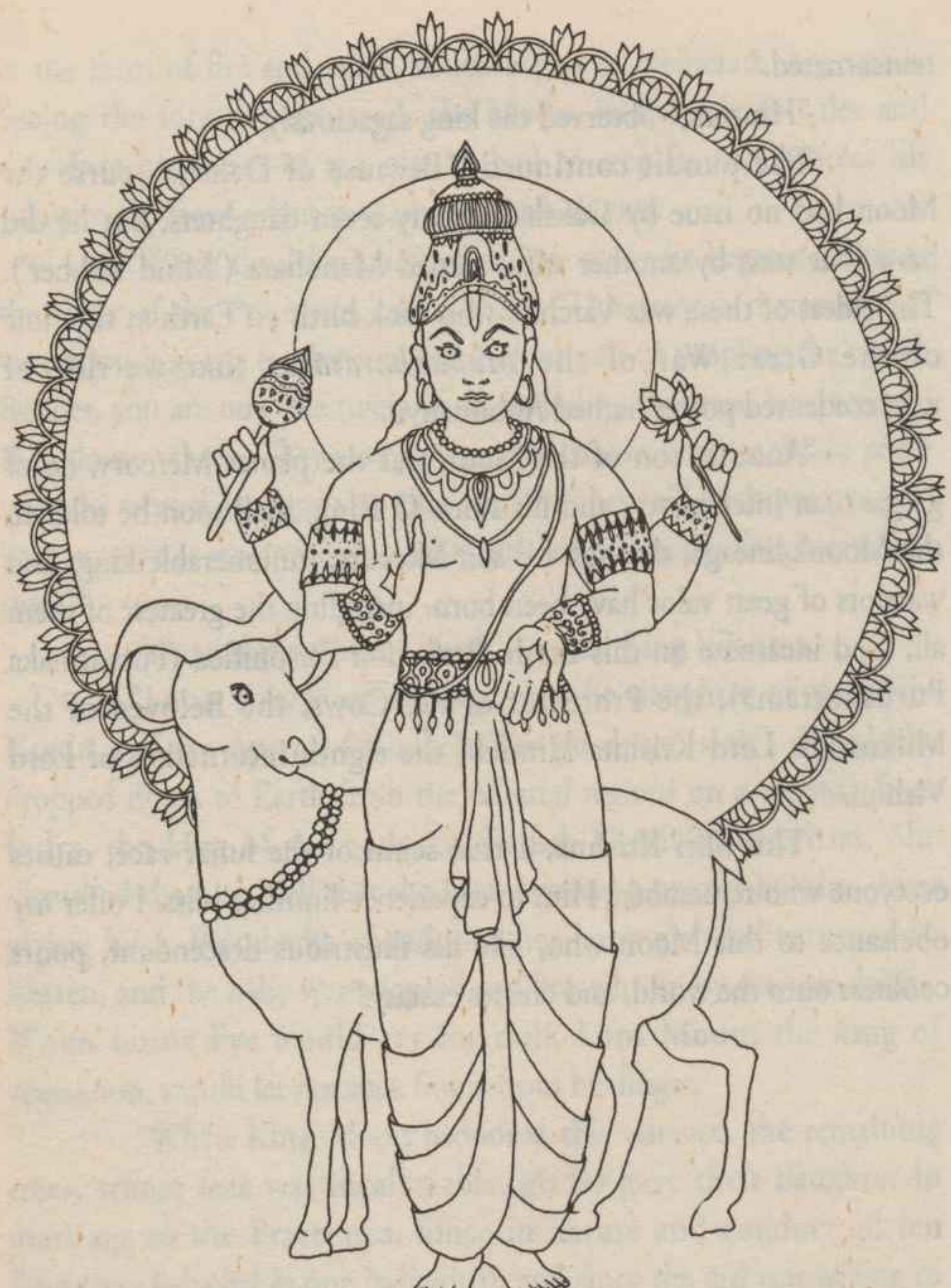
"When King Moon proposed this alliance, the remaining trees, whose fear was incalculable, gladly gave their daughter in marriage to the Pracetases. Since in nature and conduct all ten Pracetases behaved as one individual, and since the girl was willing to accept them as one individual, both sides agreed and, after the marriage, a son was born. This son was the Daksha of old, reincarnated."

"Hmmm," observed the king sagaciously.

The pundit continued: "Because of Daksha's curse the Moon had no issue by Daksha's twenty-seven daughters, but he did have four sons by another wife, named Manohara ('Mind-Robber'). The eldest of these was Varchas, who took birth on Earth at the time of the Great War of the *Mahabharata* as that warrior of unprecedented power named Abhimanyu.

"Another son of the Moon was the planet Mercury, he of gargantuan intelligence, and his story, O King, shall soon be told. In the Moon's lineage, through his son Mercury, innumerable kings and warriors of great valor have been born, including the greatest of them all, God incarnate on this Earth, Perfection Personified (Purnatmaka Purushottama), the Protector of the Cows, the Beloved of the Milkmaids: Lord Krishna Himself, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

"This Shri Krishna, a true scion of the lunar race, causes everyone who remembers Him to experience limitless bliss. I offer my obeisance to this Moon who, like his illustrious descendant, pours coolness onto the world, and creates ecstasy."



Mars ▽ कुज

Chapter Four

Mars

This mention of the bewitching Shri Krishna cast all listeners into a moment of rapt remembrance of His divine pastimes, and left everyone in awe of the Moon and his light. As they returned their attention to the debate, they turned to the third pundit, the partisan of Mars, whose fiery eyes burned with keen acuity above a broad, courageous chest.

His words penetrated his hearers' ears with a rapier's abrupt intensity as he declaimed, with a twinge of impatient certainty: "O King! Mars is exceedingly cruel, as sharp as a scimitar's blade, and becomes so furious with anyone who worships him arrogantly that he utterly destroys that person's family and prosperity. Those who worship him regularly, with humility, following the appropriate ritual, he blesses to gain wealth and lose disease. The Mars vow relieves all difficulties, especially those of illness, debt, and enemies. When you observe it, wear red clothes and flowers, and eat only once on that day of food which is red in color, like wheat.

"The short, intense Mars has a slender waist and physique, a youthful appearance, fierce blood-red eyes, and a ruddy face and body. Born from the womb of Earth, his beauty is like that of a thunderbolt, and he holds a lance in his hand. As bright as a blazing fire, he is energetic and lustful, adventurous and wrathful, inconstant but liberal. An accomplished speaker, he is also a Kshatriya, a warrior; he causes conflagration and injury. He has a Pitta constitution. Blood-red in color, overflowing with power and strength, he wears red clothes and garlands. He rules muscles and bone marrow, the south, Tuesday, and the constellations Aries and Scorpio. His metal is copper, and his gem coral. He is called Disease-Eater, Wound-Causer, the Twisted, the Auspicious, Born-from-Earth, Cruel-Eyed, and the Red-Limbed One. Because he glows like red-hot coals he is called Angaraka.

"A very ancient shrine to Mars graces our city, your majesty," proclaimed the pundit, swelling with pride, "and it is said that Mars was born near Ujjayini, on banks of our beloved Kshipra River."

"Do tell me the story of the birth of Mars," said the king obligingly.

"You have heard, your majesty, the story of the Patriarch Daksha's curse of his son-in-law, Lord Moon. The evil karma this great progenitor generated by this imprecation came to fruition when he dared to insult another of his sons-in-law, the omnipotent Lord Shiva, Mars' father.

"Long ago Daksha organized a great sacrifice to cement his position as the first among the patriarchs. To this gala, which was held at the confluence of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna, Daksha ('the Adept, the Skillful') invited all the chief gods, demigods, sages, and other eminent beings of the universe — all, that is, except Lord Shiva, the very embodiment of cosmic consciousness, who was Daksha's own son-in-law. When Lord Shiva's wife Sati ('the True One') heard news of the sacrifice she insisted on attending it, over her husband's gentle objections, but when she arrived there her father ignored her, and insulted Shiva as being unfit for polite society. Overwhelmed with emotion she told her father, 'I cannot tolerate any insult to my mate, who is the Supreme Being of the universe. Only because I am your daughter do you dare to speak thus to me. I now therefore relinquish this body of mine; I refuse to remain in it even another moment, lest I be further polluted by your overweening arrogance.'

"Sati then by force of will withdrew from her body by incinerating its innards with a fire she created from within. She was later reborn as Parvati ('Daughter of the Mountain'), and eventually, after much penance, she was reunited with Shiva.

"When the awareness of His wife's suicide surfaced in His consciousness, Lord Shiva, the Lord of Beasts, was first immobilized with grief. Then fury rose within Him, for He is quick to anger. As His wrath reached its boiling point a drop of the sweat of rage fell from His forehead, where dwells the Moon. Think of this, your majesty! It was Daksha's intemperate curse of the Moon which landed him in such hot water, and it was that same Moon who facilitated the release of Lord Shiva's fiery sweat for Daksha's destruction.

"No sooner did this drop of sweat fall to Earth than it became a fiery being of unlimited valor who, after blazing his way through the earth and through all the underworlds, burnt the seven seas. This being, known as Virabhadra ('the Auspicious Hero'), looked like a flaming fire, had many heads and many eyes, and tens of thousands of arms and legs. The embodiment of concentrated might, Virabhadra stood before his father with folded hands, saying 'Command me!'

"Lord Shiva said to him, 'Go! Destroy Daksha and his sacrifice!'

"Virabhadra instantly gathered an army of spirits and departed on his errand. At the venue of the sacrifice, where Sati's death had created a furor, a pall of anxiety settled over the celestial crowd as ominous portents abounded. When Virabhadra suddenly appeared in all his puissance, terror invested the invitees, who scattered in all directions, frantic to save themselves. Virabhadra first single-mindedly destroyed Daksha's sacrifice, and then decapitated Daksha, even though the Rishi Bhrigu tried to protect the doomed patriarch.

"When Virabhadra returned to Shiva in triumph the Lord of Beasts told him, 'You have done well to destroy Daksha's sacrifice, O irresistible one, and you have now incinerated the universe sufficiently. Pacify the cosmos again, and you shall live in the heavens, where you shall become the foremost of planets, O son of Earth! There you shall be called Angaraka.'

"Hearing this, that relentless Virabhadra's frenzy abated, and he was transformed into a planet, the equal of the great Karttikeya. Lord Shiva then permitted Daksha's sacrifice to be completed, and peace returned to the universe. Many diseases, however, first appeared in the world due to the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice. Those who fled the havoc developed *gulma* ('phantom tumor,' a type of abdominal swelling); those who had consumed sacrificial materials obtained leprosy and diabetes; insanity arose in others because of fear, grief and shock; and epilepsy developed in those exposed to the impure touch of the attacking spirits. Virabhadra himself became fever in the world, and *rakta pitta* (hemothermia, or 'heat in the blood') developed from the excessive heat of fever. These maladies, which now pervade the world, are seven of the eight major diseases which originated from greed, malice, and anger. The eighth is of course consumption, which arose due to Daksha's curse of the Moon."

"Daksha, the progenitor of many forms of life, was therefore himself responsible," mused the king, "for introducing these grievous ailments to the world. Let this be a lesson to anyone who would dare to accumulate power without first entering into right relationship with the One Reality! Now tell me of the relationship between Mars and Karttikeya."

The pundit continued: "Some authorities, my liege, say that Mars is Karttikeya, while others maintain that Mars is a planet, and Karttikeya a star of equal virility. Since it is said that those afflicted by Mars should worship Karttikeya to get relief, let me tell you his story.

"Some authorities, of course, maintain that Karttikeya was born directly from Lord Shiva's semen. When Shiva and Parvati sequestered themselves for Their honeymoon, They entered into a sexual embrace which lasted uninterrupted for one hundred million years. This awe-inspiring act of intercourse ended only because Shiva's concentration was disturbed by Agni (the god of fire); having lost His control, the Great Lord ejaculated, and Karttikeya was born.

"But other sources, my liege, insist that Karttikeya was born from the semen of Agni himself, because of his infatuation for the Krittikas (the stars who form the Pleiades). In fact, Karttikeya means "son of the Krittikas." Originally, the Pleiades were the wives of the Bears."

"The Bears?" asked the king.

"Yes, sire, the Seven Bears, for the Seven Sages (the seven stars of the Big Dipper, otherwise known as the Great Bear) were in former times called the Bears. Agni, after serving at a long sacrifice conducted by the Seven Sages, was overwhelmed with desire for the wives of these great rishis. He entered their household fires to touch them, but they refused to be tempted. This multiplied his cravings even further, so he went off to a forest, vowing either to cool his lust or, if it refused to be quelled, to give up his life because of this illicit desire.

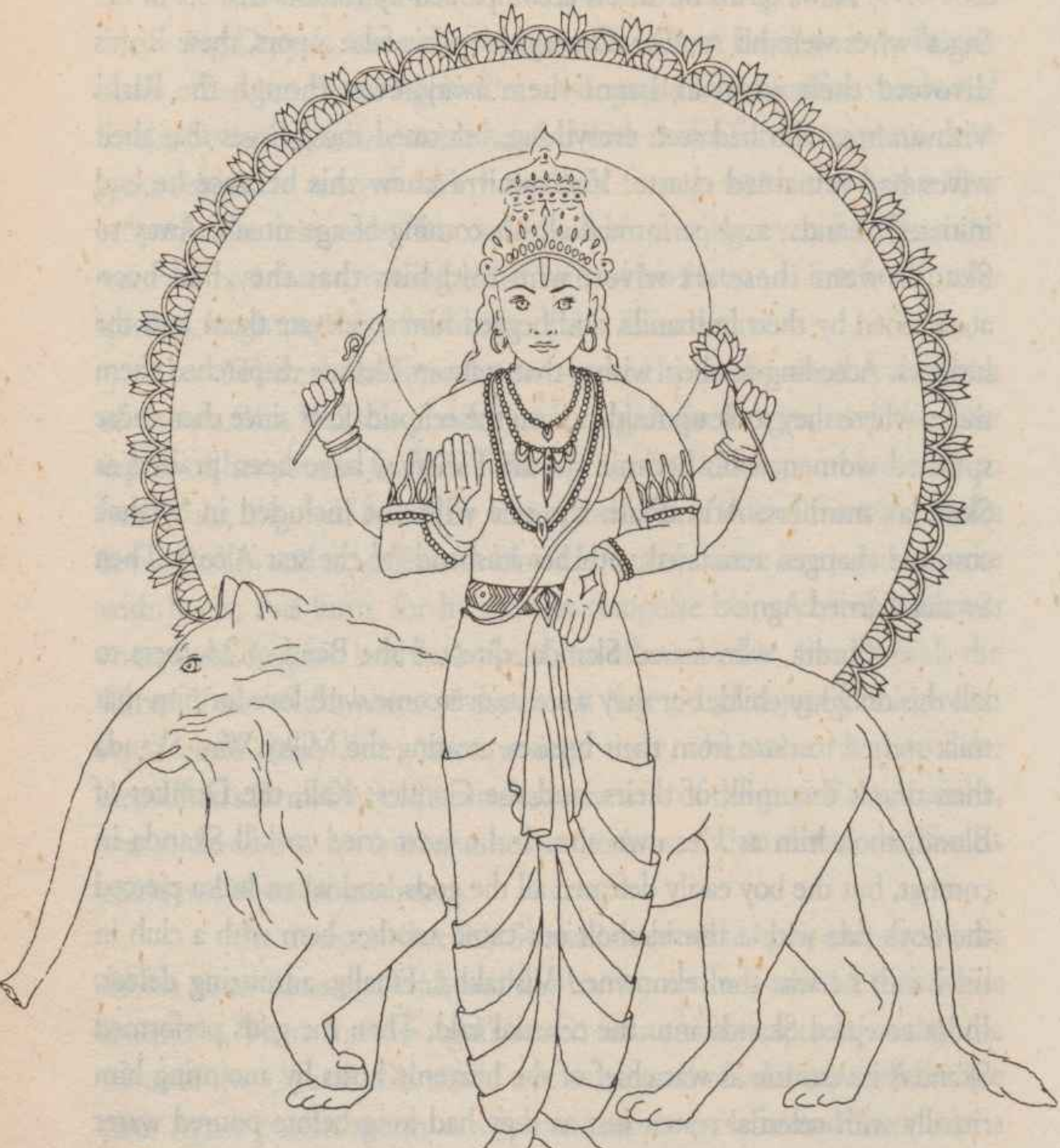
"There in the forest he was spotted by Swaha, another daughter of the prolific Daksha. Swaha had long desired Agni, and she now expressed her passion for him. When he declined to respond favorably to her, Swaha disguised herself by taking the form of one of the wives of the Seven Rishis, and made love to him. He was of course overjoyed to unite with her in this form, for he did not recognize her, and so felt he was consummating his heart's desire. One after another, Swaha took the forms of six of the wives of the Seven Sages, and enjoyed union with Agni each time. She was thwarted only when she tried to take Arundhati's form, because Arundhati, the wife of the great Rishi Vasistha, was so devoted to her husband, so meritorious, and so chaste, that Swaha could not impersonate her.

"Six times on that day Swaha mated with Agni, and afterwards she six times became a bird, and flew swiftly to the peak of a high white mountain. There she cast Agni's semen into a safe receptacle, so that the wives of the Great Rishis would not be accused of adultery with the fire god. Agni's potent sperm was spontaneously transformed there into a robust boy named Skanda. This invincible Skaṇda tormented the mountains until they and the earth glorified him; the world then adored him, and the universe rang with his praises.

"News of his birth was accompanied by rumors that six of the Sages' wives were his mother. Outraged by this false report, these Rishis divorced their wives and sent them away, even though the Rishi Vishvamitra, who had seen everything, informed those Sages that their wives had remained chaste. Vishvamitra knew this because he had initiated Skanda, and performed all his coming-of-age rituals. Away to Skanda went these six wives, who told him that they had been abandoned by their husbands, and begged him to elevate them into the heavens. Acceding to their wishes that stalwart Skanda dispatched them there, where they took up residence on the ecliptic. Ever since then those spurned women, who became the six Pleiades, have been praised as Skanda's mothers. Arundhati, the one wife not included in Swaha's costume changes, remained with her husband (as the star Alcor). Then Swaha married Agni.

"Indra, who feared Skanda, directed the Band of Mothers to kill this doughty child, but they were so overcome with love for him that milk started to ooze from their breasts, creating the Milky Way. Skanda then drank this milk of theirs, and the Goddess Kali, the Drinker of Blood, took him as Her own son. Indra next tried to kill Skanda in combat, but the boy easily defeated all the gods, and when Indra pierced the boy's side with a thunderbolt out came another hero with a club in his hand; he was the reknowned Vishakha. Finally, admitting defeat, Indra accepted Skanda into the celestial fold. Then the gods performed Skanda's investiture as war chief of the heavenly hosts by anointing him ritually with celestial water, just as they had long before poured water onto the head of Varuna, the lord of the waters.

"Such is Karttikeya, O King, and such is the planet whose deity he is, the fierce Mars. I bow low to this eternally-young Mars."



Mercury बुध

Chapter Five

Mercury

After the audience showed their appreciation to Mars' champion for his forceful presentation, Mercury's advocate took the floor. He was a paragon of the sort of versatile intelligence and mercurial mental dexterity that Mercury signifies, and everyone leaned forward that they might not miss any clever word-play or diplomatic wit that might be forthcoming.

Glancing coyly towards his master, he said: "Great King! Mercury is even mightier than is Mars, for is not brain more effectual than brawn? Experts everywhere count Mercury as the crest jewel of the Nine Planets because of his extraordinary prowess. He is the most intelligent planet of all, and he removes all the obstacles of those who worship him. As far as possible he causes no inauspicious event, but rather creates prosperity for everyone. By providing all living beings with supreme discernment he illumines their paths, both mundane and spiritual, through life.

"Mercury's color is green, the green of the sacred durva (Bermuda grass). He has a splendid, slender body and is eternally energetic. He speaks always with distinct, pure, sweet words, but loves to use ambiguities, puns, and words with double meanings. He is fond of jokes, and of fun and games; ever auspicious, always clever, he is a Vaishya, a commercial planet. This great sage Mercury, who has a pronounced aptitude for mathematics and business, rules the skin, the rational mind, and speech. His metal is brass, and his gem emerald. Vata, Pitta and Kapha are all mixed in his constitution, and he is fond of all tastes. Lord of the north, of Wednesday, and of the constellations Gemini and Virgo, he is reknowned as the Golden-Eyed, the Bewitching, the Gentle, the Knower, and the Awakener.

"Mercury is the son of the Moon. We have heard, your majesty, the story of how the Moon languished from consumption, and now we must hear the reason for that infirmity. The Law of Karma, O King, is inexorable. Nature's wheels grind slowly, but they grind thoroughly, and no living being is exempt from karma; no, not even so exalted a personage as Lord Moon.

"When the Moon came of age, he conquered the three worlds and several times performed the Rajasuya, the sacrifice which gives lordship. Nine goddesses served him: Sinivali and Kuhu (the goddesses of the two halves of the New Moon day), Vapus ('Beautiful Body'), Pushti ('Nourishment'), Prabha ('Luster'), Vasu ('the Excellent'), Kirti ('Fame'), Dhriti ('Firmness'), and Lakshmi ('Prosperity'). Then, having achieved rare glory, he became inordinately arrogant and overstepped the boundaries of propriety.

"The Moon was the chief disciple of Jupiter, the guru of the celestials, and was also the favorite of Tara ('the Star'), Jupiter's wife, who was attracted to him by his character, his nature, and his beauty. Once it happened, when Jupiter was away on an errand for the gods, that Tara and Moon eloped. Some say they fell in love; some say Tara asked the Moon not to let her fertile moment go to waste; some say the Moon abducted her by force. Though we do not know the precise circumstances of their departure, my liege, we do know what happened next: Jupiter returned home, found his wife gone, soon discovered her whereabouts, and several times sent messages to the Moon requesting his wife's return.

"The Moon, however, repeatedly refused to comply with these requests, maintaining that Tara had accompanied him of her own accord and would leave only when she was satiated with him. These replies so infuriated Jupiter that he communicated them to his disciple Indra, who sent an ultimatum to the Moon. When Moon refused to yield, Indra began a war. Venus and the *asuras* (demonic celestials who fight with the devas) took the side of Moon in this war, because of the ongoing enmity between Jupiter and Venus, while Rudra, the omnipotent Lord Shiva, took the side of the devas out of love for His preceptor Angiras, the rishi who was Jupiter's father.

"The war dragged on so long that the Great Rishis began to fear that the end of the world was nigh. Angiras therefore asked Brahma to reprimand the Moon and order him to return Tara. This the Moon did, but he returned her pregnant. When Jupiter learned of this he was furious, and said to her, 'You weak-willed woman! Expel from your womb, which is my field to plow, this fetus which was planted there by another. I am sorely tempted to reduce you to ashes for this lapse of morality; the only reason I do not do so is that I am myself eager to sow my seed in you.'

"Tara then bashfully ejected the fetus, which was a boy, radiant like gold. Seeing the child's splendor both Jupiter and Moon hankered after him, and both claimed paternity, demanding that Tara declare the true father's name. When Tara was too embarrassed to speak, her newborn child said to her angrily, 'Why do you seek to cover your transgression with false shyness? Speak!' Finally, when Brahma questioned her in private she admitted that the Moon was the father of that wonderful child, who was the planet Mercury.

"It was, your majesty, after this abduction adventure that Lord Moon annoyed 26 of his 27 wives. This karma led him to be stricken with consumption, as the fruit of his father-in-law's curse, and it denied him any children from those twenty-seven wives. The workings of karma are profound, sire."

The king mused a little space, and then said, "Amazing! All the planets that we call benefics, namely the Moon, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus, displayed their own personal frailties during this sordid episode. The Moon fornicated with his guru's wife — a sin which you can atone for, according to the mandate of religious law, only by lopping off your private parts and then walking with your severed genitals in your hands toward the north until you die. The Moon chose rather to brazen it out, with the help of Venus and the asuras, the mortal enemies of the Moon's own tribe of devas. Venus, the Great Statesman, then elected to reward the Moon's misconduct not with a reprimand but with military support, simply to spite his enemy Jupiter. Jupiter, the guru of the celestials, first assumed his wife to have become pregnant by the Moon and so ordered her to expel the fetus from her womb, but when he saw Mercury's beauty and intelligence he changed his tune. He lied, saying that he was the father, because of his desire to possess such a handsome and talented son. Even Mercury was blameworthy; he was wrong to speak to his mother

angrily, for without her dalliance he would never have been born."
The entire audience, pundits and courtiers alike, here erupted into shouts of appreciation for King Vikramaditya's astute insights.

Pleased, Mercury's pundit bowed low to his king and continued, "Yes, your majesty, you have understood the situation precisely. While we can by no means approve of the Moon's actions, Jupiter should have measured his response more carefully, for later, as a result of the karma of demanding his wife back, he also had to suffer, when he impregnated his own brother's wife.

"Listen now, O King, to the story of the illustrious progeny of Mercury. The first child of Vivasvan, the Sun, was Vaivasvata, and the first child of Vaivasvata was a girl, Ila. Vaivasvata had wanted to first have a son and had organized a sacrifice for that purpose. When he inquired of the priests how things had gone awry he discovered that his wife, Shraddha ('Faith'), had wanted a girl first, and she had therefore induced the chief officiant at the sacrifice to make a slight change in one mantra. The result was Ila.

"Vaivasvata would have none of this, however, so he overruled his wife and requested the Rishi Vasistha to propitiate Narayana, the Lord of All, to turn Ila into a boy. This Vasistha did, and Ila's name was changed to Sudyumna after the sex change.

"But, your majesty, it is easier to change your name than it is to alter your destiny! This Sudyumna grew to be a handsome and talented prince, and he remained a prince until the day he was out hunting and entered a certain forest where he and all his attendants were without any warning transformed into women. Too late he learned that the great Rudra, the bull-bannered Lord Shiva, had once been surprised by celestials in the act of lovemaking with His wife Parvati in that very forest. He assuaged Parvati's embarassment by proclaiming that any male who entered there would become female — except, of course, for Lord Shiva Himself.

"After this transmutation, Sudyumna-turned-Ila continued to wander about with her female followers in that forest until, when they came to Mercury's hermitage, she and Mercury fell in love at first sight. Their son was Pururavas, who was thus both the great-grandson of the Sun and the grandson of the Moon.

"Sudyumna afterwards wanted to become a man again, so he sought the help of Vasistha, the rishi who had made him a man in the first place. Vasistha then propitiated Lord Shiva, Who in order to both make His own words regarding the forest true and also please the rishi, judiciously ruled that Sudyumna would be a man one month and a woman the next. Sudyumna then ruled the earth, though as our scriptures state, 'His subjects never reconciled themselves to the idea of a king who changed sex periodically.' After a long rule he abdicated, entrusted his kingdom to his eldest son, Pururavas, and went to dwell in the forest as an ascetic.

"Once it happened that when the gods Mitra and Varuna saw the gorgeous Apsaras Urvashi, they spontaneously discharged their seed. Agastya originated from the portion of that semen which they deposited in a water pot, while Vasistha was born at the same time from the semen that fell to the ground. Incensed with Urvashi, the two great lords cursed her to fall to earth and wander among men.

"It then came to pass that the Divine Narada (the celestial busybody) informed Urvashi of the form, virtues, wealth, and courage of Pururavas, who had become a great king. Impressed by his good qualities, which were many, and dazzled by his beauty, which made him seem an incarnation of the god of love, Urvashi fell in love with him, and appeared before him. The king was delighted to see her and, wide eyed and goose-fleshed, he spoke to her softly and smoothly: 'Welcome, O beauty! Please be seated. What can I do for you? Let us enjoy loveplay together for eternity!'

"Urvashi replied, 'O handsome one! No woman exists whose eyes and mind would not cleave to you as mine do. My eyes so desire the delight of your embrace that they refuse to relinquish their hold on your limbs. I shall certainly enjoy life together with you with three stipulations; if you break even one of these, you will lose me. First, you must protect like a treasure these two rams that I entrust to you; they are like my children. Second, my diet consists of ghee (clarified butter) alone, which I consume once a day. Finally, I must never see you naked, except at the time of love-making.'

"Pururavas replied, 'I shall observe these restrictions without fail! What a world-beguiling form! What comportment of love! What man would not accommodate such a woman who herself approaches him?'

"Pururavas now sported as he pleased with Urvashi, who was an expert in purveying pleasure. Inebriated by the sweet flavor of her mouth,and by the lotus fragrance which exuded from all parts of her body, he dallied with her for long years.

'When the celestials began to feel that heaven was not worth living in without Urvashi, Indra dispatched gandharvas to bring her back. In the black of night these gandharvas stole away the pair of rams that Urvashi, who loved them like her own children, kept always at her bedside. Awakened by the bleating of these rams as they were being led away, Urvashi cried out in alarm, 'O, I am lost! I am undone! I put my faith in this eunuch of a husband, this worthless fellow who merely pretends to be a hero, and he has failed me! Thieves are stealing my darling rams while he lies feigning sleep like a frightened woman. Only during daylight does he act like a man!'

"Now Pururavas had not moved because he was unclothed. But these verbal arrows pricked him like a goad pricks an elephant, and so in a mood of extreme anger he rushed out naked into the night, sword in hand. At this the gandharvas let go the rams and speedily lit the place with lightning. Urvashi then saw her naked husband coming toward her leading her rams, and so disappeared. When Pururavas returned to find no wife in his bed he was drowned in the despondency of sorrow. Crazed with heartache, lost in thoughts of her, this madman searched the wide world over for Urvashi.

"He discovered her at last at Kurukshetra, seated beside the Saraswati river with five of her friends, all in a gay mood. Seeing him, they rose to leave.

"He began to wheedle: 'Dearest darling! Wait! Return with me and live with me again.'

"She said to him, 'Great hero, I am as difficult to capture as the wind.'

"He replied, 'Yes, I know. But remember the bliss we enjoyed together; remember that, whenever you desired it, you could come to my chamber day or night and I would ram you with my manhood.'

"Urvashi reminisced: 'Yes, thrice a day you would ram me with your manhood, and so you impregnated me, O Pururavas. You have ruled my body; I always yielded to your desire.'

"'I saw,' said Pururavas, 'that when I, a mortal, tried to embrace these superhuman companions of yours by throwing off their garments they fled from me like timid does or mares."

"Urvashi replied, 'Mortals who lust after immortals can connect with them only when the immortals allow them to connect. Thus I allowed you to unite with me, in the past.'

"'Yes,' said Pururavas, 'you showered your love on me, and from these showers we conceived an exceptional child. Now please grant me my 'life.'"

The pundit paused long enough to permit the king to notice the pun, for the name of the son of Pururavas and Urvashi was Ayus, and that word in Sanskrit means 'life.'

After seeing the king's face smile the pundit continued: "Urvashi replied, 'I will send you whatever is yours that we have produced together. Return home now, O muddle-head, for you cannot obtain me.'

"Seeing that Urvashi remained unmoved, Pururavas began to plead threateningly: 'Stop!' he said. 'You cannot depart hence without satisfying me; otherwise, I will today lie down in the lap of destruction, and this excellent body of mine, which has sported well with you, will fall down dead, exposed before all, and the rapacious wolves and vultures will devour it.'

"Pitying him, Urvashi tried to dissuade him: 'Do not die, O Pururavas! Do not fall down, or let the baneful wolves devour you. Lasting friendships cannot be made with women, for their hearts are the hearts of hyenas.'

"Unmoved and now more desperate, Pururavas called to her: 'Turn back! or my heart will break with grieving.'

"Urvashi relented sufficiently to say, 'I am now expecting your child. At the end of each year, my lord, you can spend a night with me, and you will have another issue.' Then she vanished from his sight.

"Pururavas returned to his city, where every pleasure seemed empty to him. Somehow, as he impatiently bided his time, a year passed with excruciating slowness. When at the end of the year he returned to Kurukshetra, he was delighted to see Urvashi there, holding a splendid child. They united together that night, and Urvashi, finding her husband profoundly grief-stricken at the prospect of further separation from her, told that pathetic king, 'It is because you are still mortal that we cannot remain together. Now that you have progeny, children who can continue to propitiate the devas with oblations, you can propitiate the gandharvas and they will give me to you. Then we will rejoice together in the heavens.'

"The king promptly extolled the gandharvas, who were so pleased that they gave him a fire-pot in which he could keep the fire that he would need to perform the ritual through which he could obtain Urvashi. In his dazed state he carried that fire-pot away with him, believing it to be Urvashi herself, but he soon realized that it was merely a fire-pot. Placing it in the forest, he returned home and spent each of his nights meditating on her.

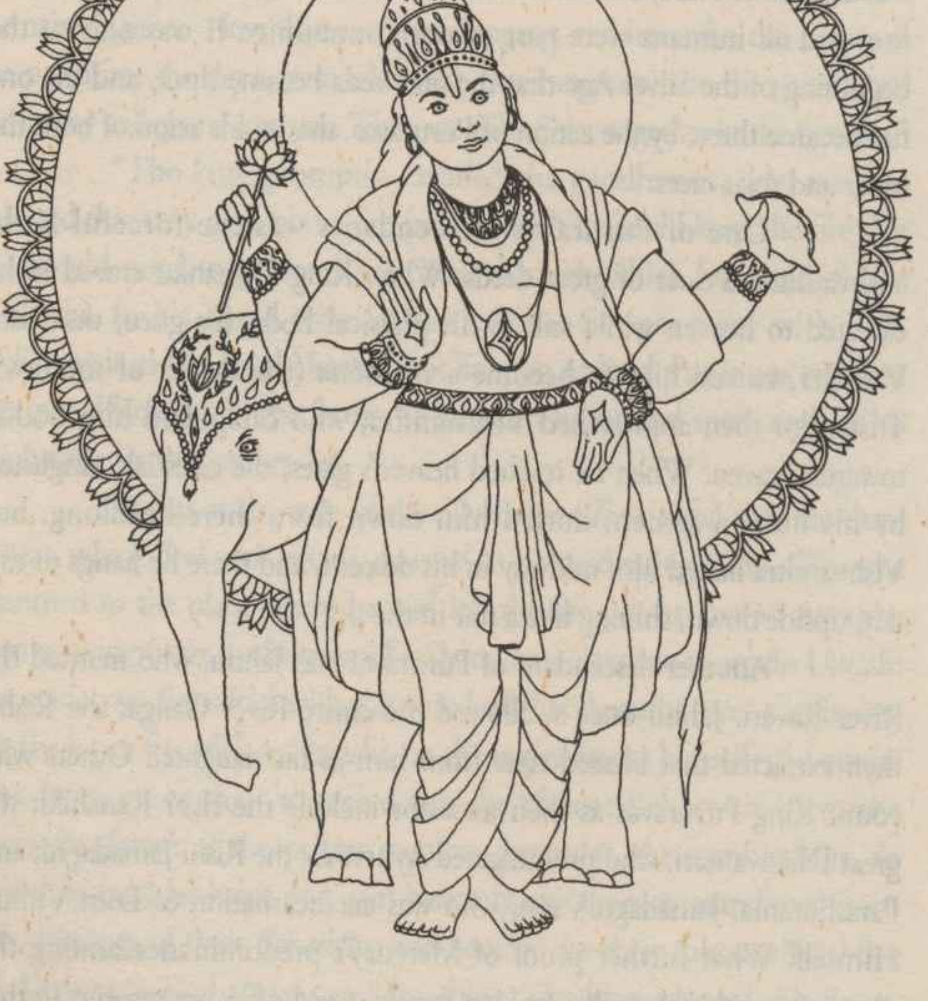
"It was at the start of the Silver Age (*Treta Yuga*) that the three Vedas, which deal with rituals, dawned in his meditating mind. When he returned to the place where he had left the fire pot he saw an Asvattha tree growing from the bottom of a Shami tree. Anxious to regain Urvashi he made two fire sticks with the wood of that Asvattha tree. Meditating on the lower fire stick as Urvashi, on the upper one as himself, and on the one between as their expected son, he churned those sticks to the accompaniment of the proper mantras. Jatavedas, the sacrificial fire, so called because he helps one gain heavenly enjoyments, manifested from the churning of these fire-sticks, and became the three-fold sacrificial fire of Ahavaniya, Garhapatya, and Dakshina. The king adopted this fire as his son, and into it he made sacrificial offerings, desiring the realm of

Urvashi. With the help of this fire who was his son, he attained the world of the gandharvas, and his Urvashi.

"In the Golden Age (*Satya Yuga*), your majesty, there was only one Veda and that was the sacred syllable Om, That Which Is Always New (*pranava*), which includes in it all possible sounds. The deity also was one only: Narayana, the Lord of All. There was but a single sacred fire, and all humans were part of one community. It was only at the beginning of the Silver Age that the one Veda became three, and the one fire became three, by the action of Pururavas, that noble scion of both the lunar and solar races.

"One of Pururavas' descendants was the forceful Rishi Vishvamitra, a doer of great deeds. When King Trishanku craved to be elevated to heaven while still in his physical body, his guru, the Rishi Vasistha, cursed him to become a *chandala* (the lowest of the low). Trishanku then approached Vishvamitra, who catapulted him bodily towards heaven. When he reached heaven's gates, the celestials, disgusted by his human stench, hurled him down from there headlong, but Vishvamitra halted him midway in his descent, and there he hangs to this day, upside down, shining like a star in the sky.

"Another descendant of Pururavas was Jahnu, who married the River Kaveri. Jahnu once swallowed the entire River Ganga; the Rishis then extracted that blessed river from him as his daughter. Others who count King Pururavas as their ancestor include the river Kaushiki; the great Dhanvantari, who promulgated Ayurveda; the Rishi Jamadagni; and Parashurama, Jamadagni's son, who was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu Himself. What further proof of Mercury's predominance among the planets is needed than this striking family tree? I offer my respects to that marvellous planet Mercury who is exceptionally handsome and mild."



Jupiter ▯ गुरु

Chapter Six

Jupiter

Jupiter's pundit was a big, benign, jovial man whose wisdom was as recondite as his good judgement. While the recent Jupiter-directed contumely may have stung him, he seemed unruffled as he began to speak: "One fundamental reason that Jupiter's greatness is more astonishing than that of Mercury is that Mercury is two-faced. A true politician, Mercury becomes auspicious when he conjoins with auspicious planets, and when he joins with malefic planets he himself becomes malefic. Jupiter is far superior, for he is the greatest benefic among the Nine Planets, and only under unusual circumstances does he temporarily display malefic traits. Indra and all the other celestials are obedient to his command, respect him as their preceptor and mentor, and follow his counsel. Those who worship Jupiter regularly and sincerely lose their worldly miseries and achieve all their cherished desires. Jupiter is truly worthy of worship, for he is particularly merciful, and his wisdom is extraordinarily profound.

"Jupiter has a big-bellied body with a broad, prominent chest and a voice like a lion's. His body, hair and eyes are of a tawny hue that shines like pure gold. Predominantly Kapha in constitution and fond of sweets, he wears yellow clothes and yellow flowers. The Brahmana Jupiter knows the Vedas and is expert in all forms of knowledge. He possesses all virtues and is modest, forgiving, and happy. His mind and senses are disciplined and his intellect subtle. Attached to ritual, he follows the path of righteousness. His metal is gold and his gem topaz.

"Lord of the body's fat, of the northeast, of Thursday, and of the constellations Sagittarius and Pisces, Jupiter is known as Lord of Worship and the Guru. He is called Teacher of the Immortals, the Soul, the Advisor, the Lord of Speech, the Golden, the Creator, the Irresistible, He Who Wears Yellow, the Young, Worthy of Worship Throughout the World, the Compassionate, Creator of Polity, Remover of Oppression, and the Peaceable.

"Jupiter's father was Angiras, the son of Brahma. Brahma once grew passionate at the sight of some apsaras and lost his seed. He put that semen into fire, and from that fire Marichi, Bhrigu, Angiras and other Rishis were born. Angiras was so called because he was born out of live coals (*angara*). It was the curse of this Angiras that caused the birth of the mighty Hanuman. Eight sons including Jupiter were born to Angiras by his wife, Shraddha. Some call Jupiter the son of the Fire God, in the sense that Angiras is an incarnation of Fire.

"Jupiter's difficult penances earned him his place as guru to the gods, and from this position he focused all his energies on advancing the cause of the celestials by thwarting the designs of the asuras. Once Venus, the guru of the asuras, went to the Himalaya to ritually worship Lord Shiva for one thousand years that he might obtain a method by which to destroy the devas. While Venus was busy with his penance, Indra sent his daughter Jayanti to obtain this method by deceit. She stayed for many years with Venus as his disciple and servant until he obtained the spell. Then, when he was about to return to the asuras, Jayanti accepted him as her husband. Because of his long-standing 'familiarity' with her, he could not refuse her request. He therefore agreed to be her husband for ten years, during which period both of them would be invisible to the world.

"Jupiter decided to make best use of this opportunity. Disguising himself as Venus he went to the asuras, who gave him a loving, sincere welcome after his supposed long penance. Jupiter settled in there, and during the ten years that he taught the asuras, he succeeded in removing hatred and factionalism from them.

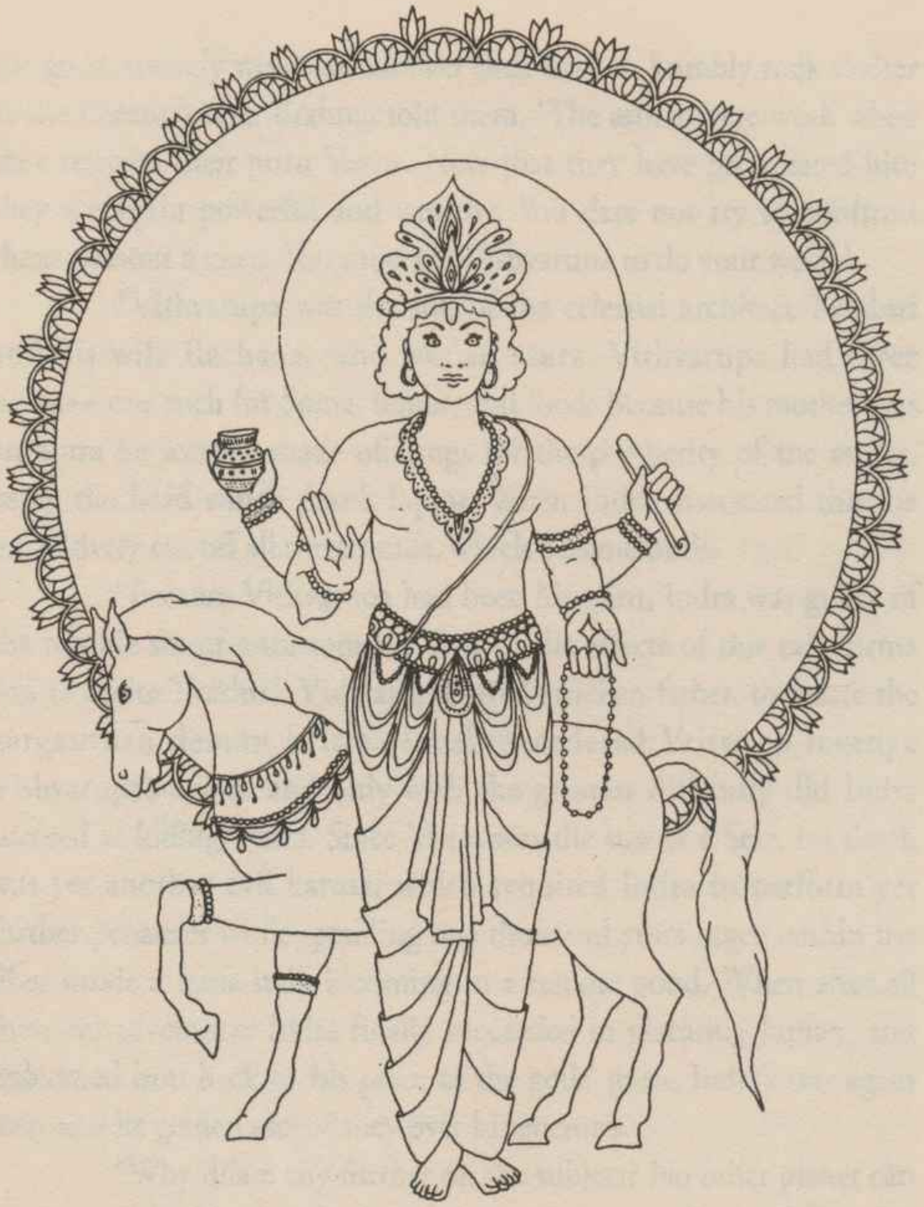
"At the end of these ten years, Venus sent Jayanti away and returned home. When the asuras saw two Venuses, they were stupefied, and in their confusion they declared that the real Venus was the one who had been teaching them for the past years. The real Venus, dismayed at their ingratitude, left indignant, cursing them that they would soon be destroyed. Shortly thereafter Jupiter resumed his real form and returned to heaven. The asuras, now like sheep without a shepherd, approached Venus again and begged his pardon. Eventually he relented and again became their guru, but his curse had its effect, and for many an age the asuras were too weak to threaten the gods.

"On another occasion the tables were turned, and it was Indra who failed to give the proper respect to Jupiter. Insulted, Jupiter stalked out of Indra's court and couldn't be traced. When he came to know of this debacle, Venus quickly incited the asuras to attack, and the gods, severely wounded all over their bodies, humbly took shelter at the Creator's feet. Brahma told them, 'The asuras were weak when they rejected their guru Venus. Now that they have propitiated him they are again powerful and wealthy. You dare not try to confront them without a guru. You must get Vishvarupa to do your work.'

"Vishvarupa was the son of the celestial architect Tvashtri and his wife Rachana, who was an asura. Vishvarupa had three heads— one each for Soma, liquor, and food. Because his mother was an asura he secretly made offerings for the prosperity of the asuras, using the head which drank liquor. When Indra discovered this, he impulsively cut off all three heads, which became birds.

"Because Vishvarupa had been his guru, Indra was guilty of the terrible sin of guru-murder. One of the effects of this evil karma was to incite Tvashtri, Vishvarupa's grief-stricken father, to create the gargantuan demon Vritra. Tvashtri ordered Vritra to revenge Vishvarupa's death, and only with the greatest difficulty did Indra succeed at killing Vritra. Since Vritra was the son of a Seer, his death was yet another evil karma, which required Indra to perform yet further penances while spending one thousand years caged within the fiber inside a lotus stalk blooming in a remote pond. When after all these misadventures Indra finally succeeded in placating Jupiter, and welcomed him back to his place as the gods' guru, Indra's star again rose, and he gained ascendancy over his enemies.

"Why dilate any further on the subject? No other planet can compare to Jupiter. I make my obeisance," the pundit concluded, "to that Jupiter, who when properly propitiated destroys all your enemies, but who if disdained destroys all your prosperity."



Venus शुक्र

Chapter Seven

Venus

Everyone expected Venus' refined, sophisticated, sociable pundit, whose turn came next, to respond to the slurs made against his chosen planet. He did so, in a Venusian manner: easy-going, accomodating, and friendly. Venusians love harmony, so this authority made his elegant ripostes gently, not aggressively.

"Jupiter is a potent planet," he began, "of this there is no doubt; but Venus has a talent that not even Jupiter possesses: he can raise the dead, with the help of the *Sanjivini Vidya.* This is why Venus is the mightiest of all the planets. He is the guru of the asuras, who serve him night and day because he uses the Sanjivini Vidya to resuscitate those of them who fall in their battles with the gods. Venus's capabilities are simply indescribable in full. He is acclaimed in all the three worlds because his power is astounding and his heroism unparalleled. Obeisance to Venus causes all obstacles, all worries, and all diseases that surround a person to flee far away, for Venus pulverizes negative karmas. He is immensely astute, and, a true Brahmana, he is an expert in every form of learning. All who worship him achieve their most cherished desires, and those who observe his night-vow for one year become happy and vigorous, obtain children and good fortune, lose all obstacles, and go to Venus's realm after death. "The fortunate, charming Venus has a medium-sized well-nourished body, long hands, prominent shoulders, a broad chest, and dark, short, curly hair. Overflowing with virility, he is intelligent, handsome, and sensuous. His constitution is Kapha-Vata, and his color resembles that of snow, or the white jasmine flower, or the fragrant white oleander, or the lotus stem. Fond of juicy things, of music, and of femininity, his metal is silver and diamond his gem. Even though Lord Venus himself has but one eye, he is the significator of eyes in a horoscope, and a Venus who is prominent in a birth chart gives beautiful eyes.

"Lord of semen and ova, of the southeast, of Friday, and of Libra and Taurus, Venus is known by such names as Ushanas, the Brilliant, the Poet, the White, the Pure, He Who Has Reached the Far Shore of the Vedas and Vedangas, Possessor of Great Intelligence, the Knower of Politics, and the Asura-Guru. Venus is the son of the Rishi Bhrigu by his wife Puloma. Bhrigu Rishi was, like Angiras Rishi, born directly from Brahma's semen, which means that Venus and Jupiter, those two implacable adversaries, are first cousins.

"Once Bhrigu was performing intense penance on the Mandara mountain, and Venus, who was then a boy, used to tend to his father's needs. It so happened that one day, when Bhrigu was absorbed in a deep meditative trance and the lonely Venus was appreciating the beauty of the sky above him, the exceptionally beautiful Apsaras Vishvachi swam into his ken. Seeing her so filled the boy's heart with delight that he sat stock still, absorbed in her bewitching charm, and all his thoughts became centered on her. In order to distract his attention from her, his mind followed Indra to Indra's world, where he was received with honor, but as he was sightseeing in heaven he unexpectedly came across the apsaras whose beauty had drawn his mind there in the first place.

"They fell in love at first sight of each other, and to fulfill his desire Venus created a hut from thick foliage in a small corner of heaven, which he then enveloped in darkness. That couple thereupon indulged in lovemaking in their bower for eight cycles of the Four Ages. Then, when Venus's good karmas had finally been used up, he fell from heaven down to the Moon, whence his soul reached the earth through rain that fell on a rice paddy. Entering the semen of a Brahmana who ate that rice, and then entering the womb of that Brahmana's wife via his semen, Venus was reborn in that Brahmana family.

"He then led an austere life on Mount Meru for as long as the life of the Progenitor of that epoch, until his path again crossed that of Vishvachi, who had been cursed to live there as a female deer. He fell in love with the deer and mated with her; the result was a human child, who distracted his mind from his meditation. The Brahmana who had been Venus died of snake bite not long after, and then, reborn as prince of Madra, ruled that country for many years. Afterwards he took many other births, including one as a bamboo forest and another as a python, until at last he was born as the son of a Seer living on the banks of the river Ganga.

"His original body, meanwhile, had long ago dropped to the earth after extended exposure to wind, rain and sun, but the power of

Bhrigu's penance prevented it from decaying or being eaten. After one thousand divine years, Bhrigu opened his eyes to find not his living son but a famished, worn-out body lying nearby. Small birds nested in the wrinkles of the skin, and frogs had taken refuge in the hollow of the stomach. In his fury over his son's premature death, he was about to curse Yama, the god of death, when Yama appeared before him and said, 'Please do not waste your accumulated spiritual power by cursing me. All created beings are my food; I have already devoured innumerable universes. Besides, your son fell into this state because of his own actions,' which he then recounted to the distraught father. Yama ending by saying, 'He is now performing penance on the banks of the river Ganga; open your inner eye and see for yourself!'

"Yama then revived the body of Venus, who rose up and did obeisance to his father. Bhrigu thereupon taught the boy his past lives,and showed him the road to spiritual success. Venus set out on this road to gain the favor of Lord Shiva, but even after worshipping Him for five thousand years he had achieved no result. He then determined to live solely on smoke for one thousand years more, until Shiva appeared to him. Lord Shiva did finally appear and blessed Venus that he would eventually become His son.

"Shiva also taught Venus the Sanjivini Vidya, which is otherwise known only to Shiva, His wife Parvati, and Their two sons Ganesha and Skanda. In addition, Shiva named Venus the best of the planets and told him that his rise in the sky would inaugurate the performance of all asupicious rituals. It is for this reason that marriages are performed only when Venus is rising in the sky. Venus himself has enjoyed several wives and has been blessed with daughters and sons.

"Venus became Lord Shiva's son in this way: Parvati once playfully covered Shiva's eyes, which plunged the universe into immediate darkness. Hurriedly freeing those eyes, Parvati returned light to the cosmos and saw before her a young boy. When She asked Her husband whence the child had come, He replied laughingly, 'You created him by creating darkness, O Goddess. He is your son. Let us call him Andhaka ('Darkness').' Because Parvati refused to accept the child, Lord Shiva presented Andhaka to the asura Hiranyaksha as an adopted son, and the boy rapidly grew into a stalwart demon who harried the gods mercilessly. When, during a war with the devas, the army of this Andhaka was annihilated by the overwhelming power of the celestial army, he fled from the field of battle and took refuge with his preceptor, Venus, who reassured him and revived the asura hosts.

"Angered at this tactic, Lord Shiva captured Venus and swallowed him, and while he was thus trapped inside Lord Shiva, the fortunes of war turned decidedly against the asuras. Venus wandered about in Lord Shiva's body for one hundred celestial years. Inside Shiva's belly he saw all the various universes, all the devas and the asuras, and even the war. Eventually, finding no other way to exit, he emerged through Shiva's penis and then paid obeisance without delay to that great god. Very impressed by this feat, Shiva named him *Shukra* (which can mean 'white,' 'the planet Venus,' and 'semen') and acknowledged him as His son, thus fulfilling His promise. It is to this Venus, the son of Shiva, the planet who possesses the Sanjivini Vidya, that I bow."

Intermezzo

The Debate

"It is true, your majesty," Jupiter's pundit now broke in, "that at one time the Sanjivani Vidya was the exclusive preserve of the planet Venus, but later Jupiter obtained it as well."

Venus's pundit countered, with a tastefully sidelong glance at his opposite number: "Indeed it is so, your majesty, but while Venus obtained that skill by performing stiff penance, Jupiter gained it through subterfuge. Let me recount to you the "circumstances" of that affair. Because the Sanjivani Vidya gave the asuras such an advantage over the devas in war, and because the devas knew that the asuras would continue to possess this advantage so long as Venus alone had this power, they forced Jupiter to send his son Kacha to live with Venus, serve him, and study with him, that Kacha might somehow learn from Venus the way to raise the dead. The devas went so far as to suggest that the way to Venus's heart was through his beautiful daughter, Devayani, and advised the boy to cultivate her friendship industriously.

"After Kacha reached the city of the asuras, he went straight to Venus, told him who he was, and formally requested Venus to tutor him for a period of one thousand years. All the asuras warned Venus against accepting the boy as a student, for they knew that if Kacha learned it, the devas could then use the information against the asuras in battle.

"But Venus told them, 'I will never turn away anyone who comes to me for knowledge. The devas have humbled themselves sufficiently to send the son of their preceptor to me, and I will teach him, for he is worthy to be taught; and by honoring him his father Jupiter is honored.'

"Was that not," asked Venus's pundit convincingly, "an act of extreme magnanimity on the part of Lord Venus to agree to teach the son of his bitter enemy?"

"It certainly was," replied Jupiter's pundit, with some irony, "but what happened next? Though the asuras dared not challenge their guru directly, they did so behind his back; they murdered Kacha."

"That they did," admitted the pundit of Venus, "but they did so after even further provocation, when Devayani fell in love with Kacha — a love to which Kacha responded. She loved him honestly, for himself, but he had an ulterior motive; he loved her only as a means to his end. The asuras acted because if Kacha was to marry Devayani, they knew the Sanjivani Vidya would become his by inheritance. They waited patiently for five hundred years, and then they slew him."

"Yes," Jupiter's pundit agreed, "they did — and they left his body for the wolves and the jackals to devour."

"And then," continued the pundit of Venus, "Kacha was brought back to life with the help of the Sanjivani Vidya. Not once, but twice; the second time was after the asuras had ground Kacha's body into a paste and dispersed it into the sea. More magnanimity, on Venus's part."

"And then what happened?" Jupiter's pundit inquired insistently, a hint of haughtiness glimmering on his features. "The third time the asuras killed Kacha, they burned his body and dissolved his ashes into a goblet of wine, which they then offered to Venus. Venus accepted it unsuspectingly, toasting the success of the asuras as he drank it. When he learned that Kacha was again deceased, he advised Devayani to forget the boy, since the asuras were intent on killing him, and everyone eventually has to die. But Devayani threatened to end herself unless her father consented to revive Kacha a third time. What a shock it must have been to Venus to find the boy inside his own belly! Now all he could do was to train his daughter Devayani in the Sanjivani Vidya. As he taught her Kacha, listening from inside his abdomen, learned it too. When Devayani brought Kacha back to life Venus died there on the spot, his gut split apart. Then she pronounced it again and returned Venus to life.

"And then," said the pundit of Venus, quietly resolute, "Venus cursed the asuras for their stupidity, and cursed alcohol, because it makes one speak what should not be spoken. He next told Kacha that he should marry Devayani since both of them now knew the Sanjivini Vidya. And what did Kacha say to his guru? He said, 'Because I have been born from your belly I am now a son to you, and if Devayani and I marry it will be like the marriage of a brother and sister.'

"Devayani told Kacha, 'Our love is more than that of brother and sister. Thrice I caused my father to bring you back to life; you owe your life to me. How can you refuse to become the flesh of my flesh?'

But Kacha had achieved what he had been instructed to achieve, so what did he care for Devayani's love? He refused her again."

"And then Devayani cursed Kacha for not marrying her," interposed the pundit of Jupiter. "She said, 'So you loved me only to get access to this knowledge. I curse you now, that your knowledge will never be of any use to you.'

"And Kacha cursed her in return, didn't he, in spite of his own guilt in the matter?" retorted Venus's pundit. "He told her, 'Even if I cannot use this knowledge myself, I can teach it to others, and they can use it. But because you have cursed me, I tell you now that you will never find a Brahmana to marry; you shall have to marry a king or a prince.' Did that show great righteousness?"

"Now let me tell you what happened next," he proceeded without pausing, to preclude further comment from the garrulous Jovian. "Sharmishtha, the daughter of King Vrishaparvan of the asuras, was reknowned for her beauty. Once she and her companions, including Devayani, went to a lakeshore and, stripping themselves, sported in the water. As they splashed each other Lord Shiva rode by on His bull, with Parvati. Abashed, they leapt out of the water and ran for their clothes. When Sharmishtha donned Devayani's garments by mistake Devayani was terribly annoyed and said, 'What audacity! Her father is my father's disciple, and like a dog who eats sacrificial offerings this servant maid has put on my dress.'

"Sharmishtha, who was infuriated like a trampled snake, bit her lips and, breathing rapidly, said, 'O beggar girl! Think of your own condition first before you talk. It is you who are the dog, a watchdog in our house who eats what crumbs we deign to provide you.' Aflame with anger, she stripped Devayani of her clothes, and threw her into a well.

"After Sharmishtha's departure, fate caused King Yayati, who was out hunting, to come by searching for water. When he looked down into the well and saw Devayani he extended his hand down to her to help her up. She then told him, 'O King! Now that you have held my hand in yours we are married.' Yayati had no alternative but to agree. The curse of Kacha thus came true.

"When Devayani informed her father of all that had transpired, Venus threatened to leave the asuras because of Sharmishtha's hasty actions. To prevent this, King Vrishaparvan sent Sharmishtha to be Devayani's serving maid. Before they departed for their new home, Venus soberly warned Yayati not to bed Sharmishtha; but in the fullness of time the king did anyway, when Sharmishtha importuned him on seeing Devayani pregnant.

"Devayani became utterly inconsolable at her husband's faithlessness and so returned to her father, wailing about Sharmishtha's tricks. Venus then cursed Yayati with premature old age, and when Yayati begged forgiveness, Venus told him coldly, 'If you find someone who is willing, you can transfer your dilapidation to him.' Four of Yayati's five sons refused to give up their youth for their father, but the fifth, Puru, one of Sharmishta's sons, agreed. After Yayati had his mind, word and body returned to youth, he enjoyed life with Devayani intensely for one thousand years, without becoming satiated. Finally, when he saw the worthlessness of his perpetual sensuality, he returned Puru's youth to him, renounced the world, and went to the forest with Devayani to meditate on Reality."

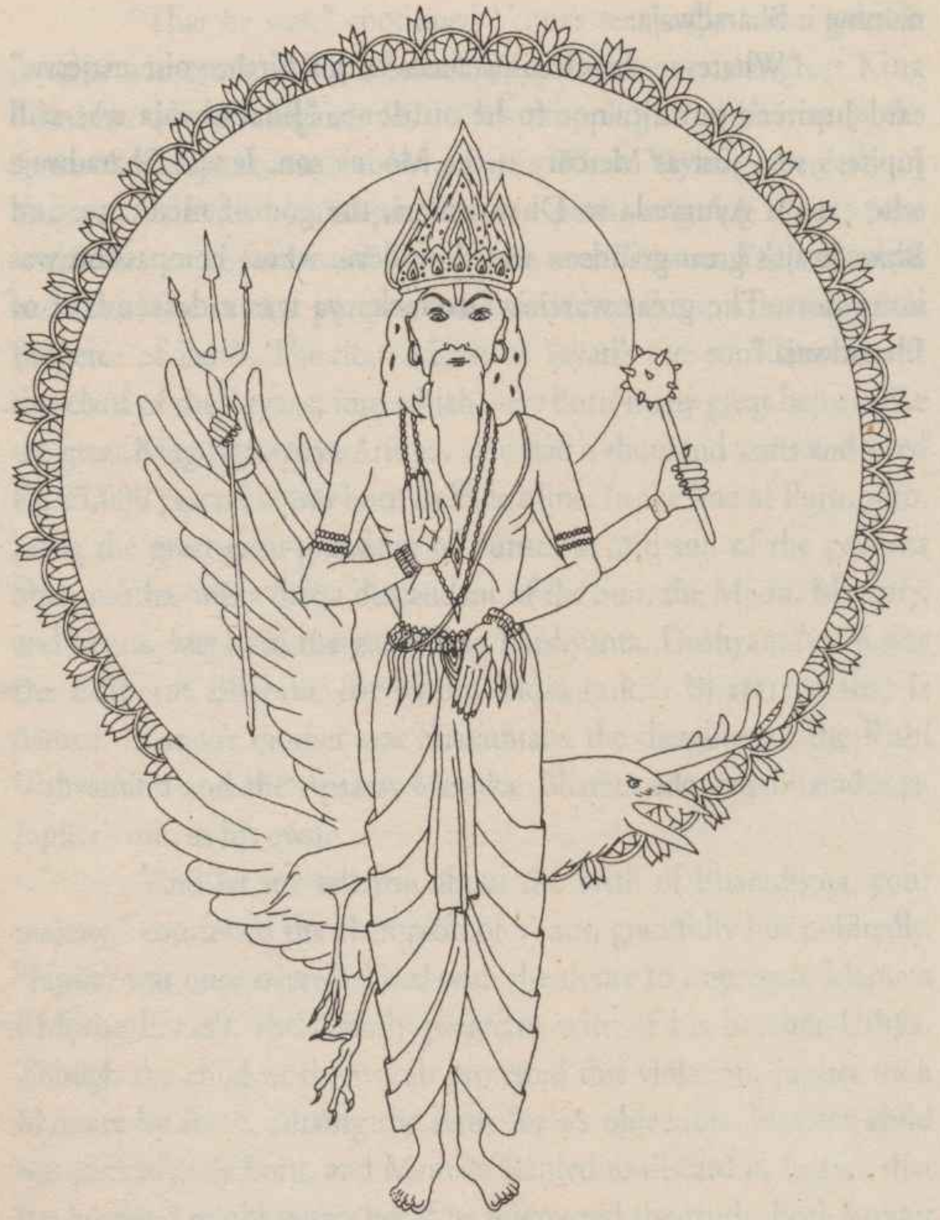
"And who was this Yayati?" broke in Mercury's champion.

"He was the great-grandson of the great Pururavas!"

"That he was," continued Venus's seemingly-imperturbable pundit, without missing a breath. "His father was the great King Nahusha, whose arrogance led to his dropping from heaven in the form of a serpent, cursed by a rishi. When Yayati was ready to abdicate, he divided his empire into five parts, assigning the portions to the east, south, west and north to his sons Turvasu, Yadu, Druhyu and Anu. The central portion was awarded to Puru, who was made Emperor of Earth. The descendants of Yayati's five sons became the five clans of the Aryans, into which were born many great heroes, like the great King Kartavirya Arjuna, who had a thousand arms and lived for 85,000 years. He was born in Yadu's line. In the line of Puru, who, being the great-great-grandson of Pururavas and son of the princess Sharmishtha, was a direct descendant of the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, and Venus, was born the great King Dushyanta. Dushyanta's son was the Emperor Bharata, for whom India (a.k.a. Bharatavarsha) is named. Bharata's mother was Shakuntala, the daughter of the Rishi Vishvamitra and the Apsaras Menaka. Bharata adopted Bharadwaja, Jupiter's son, as his own.

"And let me tell you about the birth of Bharadwaja, your majesty," continued the champion of Venus, gracefully but pointedly. "Jupiter was once overwhelmed with the desire to impregate Mamata ('Motherliness'), the already-pregnant wife of his brother Uthya. Though the child in the womb protested this violation, Jupiter took Mamata by force, cursing the fetus for its objection. Jupiter's child was immediately born, and Mamata wanted to discard it, fearing that her husband might desert her if he discovered the truth. Both Jupiter and Mamata wanted the other to take care of it — so they abandoned it there. The Maruts (the wind gods) found that child and reared it, naming it Bharadwaja.

"Whatever the circumstances of his birth, your majesty," said Jupiter's pundit, not to be outdone, "Bharadwaja was still Jupiter's son, just as Mercury is the Moon's son. It was Bharadwaja who taught Ayurveda to Dhanvantari, the god of medicine, and Bharadwaja's great-grandson was Rantideva, whose compassion was boundless. The great warrior Dronacharya was a descendant of Bharadwaja."



Saturn शनि

Chapter Eight

Saturn

King Vikramaditya, to forestall further wrangling, motioned for quiet at this point and said, "Now tell me about the seventh planet."

The tall, dark, thin seventh pundit, whose dress and manner betokened his traditionalist conservative nature, was the very portrait of disciplined authoritativeness. He spoke with his eyes slightly downcast, a shadow of harshness in his voice. His words reverberated across the palace's marble like the caw of a distant crow skips along the surface of a glacier.

"O King!" he began. "Saturn is the supreme terrifier among the planets. All beings fear him, for he rules bereavements and misfortunes. If pleased he will give you a kingdom, but if irate he will snatch everything away from you in a moment. His grace makes you happy, while his wrath so thoroughly ruins you that your name is completely forgotten in the human world. Saturn determines longevity and death, for he is Lord of Time. The ambition of kings is great, but their lives are fleeting. All the kings who have ever ruled the earth with their might have been reduced by Time to tales that others tell. Even King Indra and all the gods panic when Saturn is nearby, for over the ages many thousands of Indras have been overtaken by the power of Time.

"Lord Saturn is tall, black, long-limbed, and emaciated, with reddish-brown eyes, large teeth and nails, prominent veins, a sunken stomach, a long beard, matted locks, and profuse coarse, stiff body hair. He is lame and his limbs are rigid; his constitution is Vata. Intensely harsh, he is cruel in authority, and his gaze, which is directed downward, is utterly terrifying. He is a Shudra; some even call him outcaste. By trade he is an oil-presser who worships Kala Bhairava ('the Great Black Terrifier'). His metal is iron, and his gem is blue sapphire.

"Lord of the sinews and nerves, of the west, of Saturday, and of the constellations Capricorn and Aquarius, he is also known as the Slow, Son of Shadow, the Angular, the Black, the Endless, the End-Causer, the All-Devouring, the Steady, the Controller, the Famished, and the Emaciated.

"Saturn is the son of the Sun and his wife's shadow Chaya. As soon as Saturn was born, his gaze fell on his father and caused vitiligo; his gaze next fell on the Sun's charioteer, who fell and broke his thigh; and when that gaze lit upon the seven horses of the Sun's chariot they all went stone blind. The Sun tried a number of remedies to remove these infirmities but nothing worked. It was only when Saturn's gaze left them that the Sun's skin cleared, his charioteer's femur healed, and his horses regained their sight.

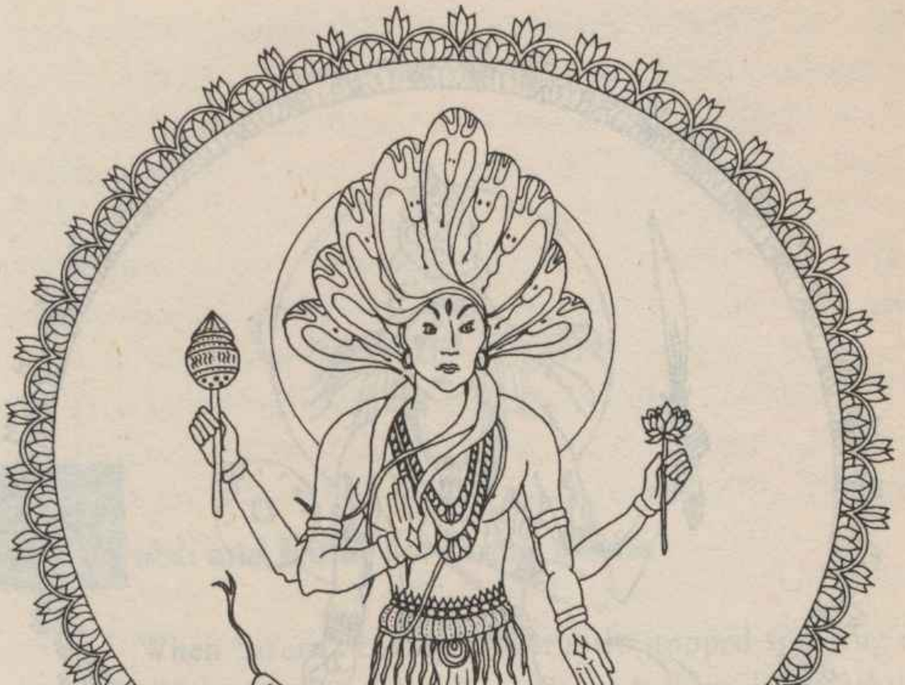
"Although Saturn became a planet after performing penance in Benaras and propitiating Lord Shiva, he did not even spare his benefactor. When Shiva's son Ganesha was born, his mother Parvati wanted to show the boy to Saturn. Saturn politely advised Her not to do so, but when She insisted, he gazed at the child reluctantly with only one eye. Instantly Ganesha's head was reduced to ashes. To prevent Parvati in Her anger from destroying the universe, Lord Vishnu flew north on His eagle Garuda and, finding a bull elephant exhausted from intercourse with his mate, cut off his head, returned with it, and joined it successfully to Ganesha's body.

"If you hope to prevent Saturn from mangling your life, as he has mangled so many lives, make regular offerings of black sesame seeds, sesame oil, and sugar on Saturdays to an iron image of that planet; also, make Saturday donations of sesame and iron to the needy. I make my sincere obeisance to that Lord Saturn whose color is that of pure collyrium, who is the son of the Sun and Shadow, and who is the brother of Yama, the god of righteousness and death."

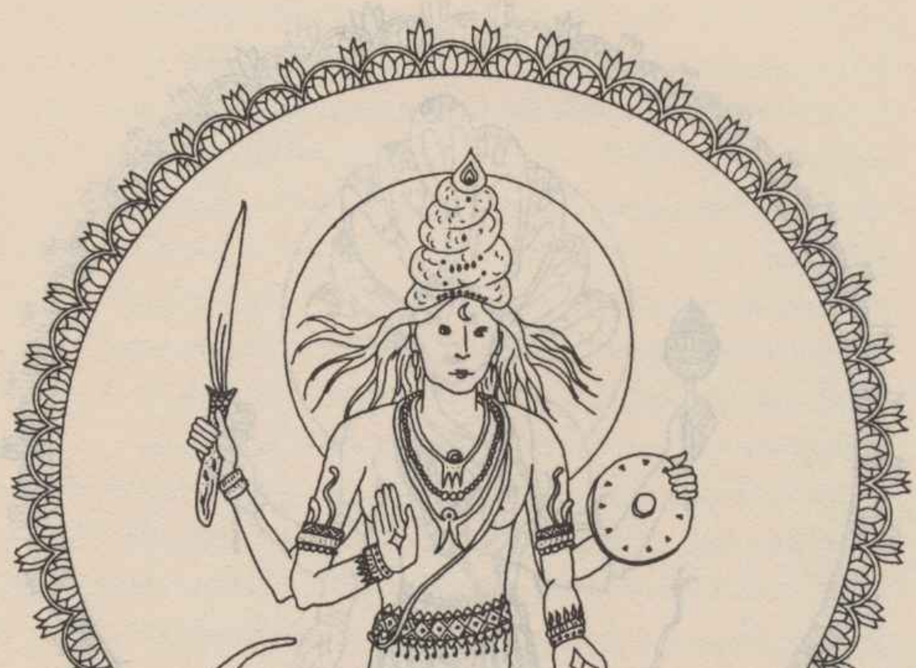
Although Saturn became a planet after performing penance at Benares and propitiating Lord Shiva, he did not even spare his benefactor. When Shiva's son Ganesha was born [illegible] the parents wanted to show the boy to Saturn, Saturn politely refused [illegible] to do so, but when She insisted, he gazed at the child reluctantly with only one eye. Instantly Ganesha's head was reduced to ashes. To prevent [illegible] Her anger from destroying the universe, Lord Vishnu flew north on His eagle Garuda and, finding a small elephant, [illegible] with it and joined it successfully to Ganesha's body.

If you hope to prevent Saturn from mangling your life, as he has mangled so many lives, make regular offerings of black sesame seeds, sesame oil, and urad on Saturdays, to an iron image of that planet; also fast on Saturday, donate black sesame and urad to the needy. I make my sincere obeisance to that Lord Saturn, whose color is that of pure collyrium, who is the son of the Sun and Shadow, and who is the brother of Yama, the god of righteousness and death. [illegible] Sun's Son, Shadow['s son], the Ancient, the Black, the Endless, the [illegible], the All-Devouring, the Steady, the Controller, the Emaciated, and [illegible].

Saturn is the son of the Sun and his wife Shadow [illegible]. As soon as Saturn was born, his gaze fell on his father and caused [illegible]; his gaze then fell on the Sun's charioteer, who [illegible], and [illegible] that gaze fell upon the seven horses of the Sun's chariot [illegible] went stone blind. The Sun tried all types of remedies [illegible], but nothing worked. It was only when Saturn gave [illegible] that the Sun's skin cleared, his charioteer's [illegible] and his horses regained their sight.



Rahu राहु



Ketu केतु

Chapter Nine

Rahu and Ketu, the Lunar Nodes

When Saturn's champion abruptly stopped speaking a stunned silence descended on the audience hall until the eighth pundit found his voice: "Rahu and Ketu, the Two Nodes, are two most terrible planets, born in the race of asuras. Whenever the Sun or Moon enter the Nodes' space, those shining ones begin to quiver in fear, for an eclipse occurs whenever these demons conjoin the luminaries. Some say that Rahu expressly afflicts the Moon, and Ketu the Sun. Rahu and Ketu likewise eclipse the lives of living beings, and, though they spare no one, you can be happy if you worship them and make appropriate offerings. Since they among the planets are particularly cruel, it is essential to worship them regularly. When propitiated, Rahu fills one with mercy and removes diseases and fear of snakes, while a pleased Ketu gives transcendental wisdom.

"The intelligent Rahu, who has a Vata constitution, is the severed head of the son of the mighty Viprachitti and his wife

Simhika, the sister of Prahlada. Prahlada, as you know, was made deathless because of his devotion to Lord Vishnu. Ketu is the dismembered body of which Rahu was the head. Some say that a comet is Ketu's tail made visible. Rahu's form is like bluish-black smoke; he lives in forests and is fear-inspiring. The ugly and terrifying Ketu, the chief among the stars and planets, is akin to Rahu but is variegated in color. Rahu's temple icon wears a half-moon on his head, and Ketu's image holds in his hands a sword and a lamp.

"Rahu rules lead and agate, while Ketu rules earth and turquoise. Together they rule the southwest. Rahu's names include Svarbhanu, Minister of Asuras, the Half-Bodied, the Ever-Angry, the Serpent, Persecutor of the Luminaries, the Horrible, King of Seizers, the Black, the Terrifier, the Powerful, the Fanged, Bloody-Eyed, Indolence, and the Big-Bellied, while Ketu is known as the Crested, the Bannered, the Head, the Chief, the Smoky-Headed, and the Appalling.

"Rahu and Ketu were split apart at the time of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, which came about as the result of a curse by Durvasas, the incredibly irritable brother of the Moon. This curse by Durvasas caused the glory, luster, and prosperity of the devas to wane, as the Moon had waned when he was cursed by Daksha. Dejected and forlorn, the celestials consulted Brahma, who consulted Lord Vishnu. Vishnu told them, 'The present time is propitious for your foes the asuras, but not for you. You will have to bide your time until Time turns in your favor. Meanwhile, make peace with your enemies, and cooperate with them to churn the Ocean of Milk, that you may obtain *amrita* (the nectar of immortality) thereby.'

"This they did. Adding all kinds of medicinal grasses, bushes, creepers and other plants into the Ocean, and using Mount Mandara for the churning rod and the Serpent Vasuki for the churning stick, the devas and the asuras industriously churned the Ocean of Milk. The Blessed Vishnu, incarnate as the Primordial Tortoise, helped them by simultaneously holding up the mountain on His back and pressing it down invisibly. The high and low tides that we find in the ocean today derive from the surge of the Divine Turtle's breath that escaped as He was being lulled to sleep by the scratching of the gyrating Mount Mandara's rocky bottom on His back during the Churning.

"Lord Vishnu also assisted the process by making Vasuki resistant to pain, and by entering the hearts of both devas and asuras to embolden them. In the words of the Srimad Bhagavata, 'with the furious abandon of drunkards, they churned the ocean with all their might and main, causing wild consternation among the aquatic creatures.' The egotistic asuras, proud of their knowledge and glory, had insisted on holding Vasuki's head, and Vishnu had advised the devas to acquiesce. The devas therefore smugly clung to Vasuki's tail as they churned and watched the asuras being blasted by the fiery poison that the distressed snake exhaled.

"The first substance to emerge from the Ocean of Milk during this churning was the notorious Halahala poison, which seemed ready to destroy the universe. It sent everyone scrambling for Lord Shiva, Who drank but did not swallow it; he kept it in His throat, which it turned blue. The drops of poison that leaked from His hand were appropriated by scorpions, snakes, venomous reptiles, and poisonous herbs.

"The next thing to emerge was Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow, whom the rishis took for themselves. Next came the celestial horse Ucchaishravas ('Uplifted-Ear'), who was requested by

Bali, king of the asuras. The fourth treasure was Airavata, the celestial elephant, who went to Indra. Fifth was the Kausthubha gem, which Lord Vishnu placed on His own chest. The sixth treasure was the Parijataka (wish-fulfilling tree), which was transplanted to heaven. This was followed by a bevy of apsarases, who attracted all the celestials. The eighth treasure was the alluring Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, Who chose Vishnu for Herself. Lakshmi's gracious glance perfected all virtues in the celestials, and established them in perfect bliss. The asuras, thus abandoned by Lakshmi, lost all their higher qualities, including valor, restraint, and cooperation, and propensities like greed gained ascendancy in their minds. After Lakshmi appeared Varuni, the goddess of liquor, whom the asuras took, since Vishnu had taken Lakshmi.

"Finally Dhanvantari, the god of medicine, arrived, holding in his hand the pot of amrita. The asuras snatched it, and would have devoured it had not Mohini ('the Enchantress') arrived on the scene. When Mohini displayed to all the most beautiful female form ever seen in the universe, the asuras were overwhelmed with lust for her. Little did they suspect that She was Lord Vishnu in disguise. She agreed to divide the amrita between the gods and asuras only if they would all abide by her actions, irrespective of whether those actions seemed right or wrong. Blinded by their craving for her, the asuras agreed.

"The next day Mohini moved among the exhausted churners, the cloth slipping suggestively from her jug-like breasts, murmuring sweetly to the still-dazzled asuras while feeding the amrita to the devas all the while. Rahu disguised himself and, seating himself amidst the gods between the Sun and Moon, managed to drink a drop of the amrita. Seeing this deception, those two effulgent orbs speedily snitched to Vishnu, Who severed Rahu's head with His discus. Since the nectar droplet had by that moment only reached his neck, Rahu's body fell down dead, but his head lived on, to torture the Sun and Moon for betraying him. Rahu swallows them with gusto, but since he is now only a head, the luminaries pass through him, and again become visible when the eclipse is ended. Rahu's body was later revived and became Ketu. Garlic sprang up wherever drops of Rahu's blood fell to Earth; its medicinal qualities are like those of amrita, but it has a Rahu-like effect on the minds of those who consume it.

"I bow to Rahu and Ketu, the two shadow planets who eclipse the minds of those they afflict."

Chapter Ten

The Begging of the Universe

"It would seem then," said King Vikrama, after some deliberation, "that Lord Vishnu in the form of Mohini, the Enchantress, helped the devas to steal the asuras' share of the amrita. Robbery is also an evil karma, is it not?"

"It is, your majesty, and eventually the gods had to pay for it," replied the eighth pundit. "As soon as they realized Mohini's deception, the asuras attacked the devas, but the gods were now fortified with amrita and so they easily defeated their weakened adversaries. After the battle Venus used the Sanjivani Vidya to revive the dead asuras, including their King Bali. Though beaten, the noble Bali did not grieve, for he was a philosopher and knew well how evanescent is worldly life.

"After Bali had recuperated from his death and defeat he took the advice of Venus, and of the other members of the Bhrigu family who were his advisors, and collected great spiritual power by performing difficult penances. Eventually, at a cosmic moment which was propitious for the asuras and inauspicious for the devas, Bali was able to conquer heaven. Now it was Jupiter's turn to advise his king, Indra, to go into hiding and bide his time until his enemy's star should sink. Bali then became ruler of the universe, and Venus made him perform one hundred horse sacrifices, that he might retain his new power and consolidate his new position as cosmic overlord.

"Aditi, who is the mother of all the devas, was so very distressed by this disaster that had befallen her children that her husband, the Rishi Kashyapa, caused her to perform a vow accompanied by a milk fast during the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Phalguna. During the course of this vow the Blessed Vishnu appeared to her and promised to be born as her son. A portion of Vishnu then entered Kashyapa, who transmitted it to his wife. When their son was born, He displayed a divine form to His parents, that they might know the true identity of their child, and then in the next instant He changed Himself into a short Brahmana, in the same way that an actor changes his costume. The gods and sages who conducted His post-natal ceremonies named Him Vamana. As soon as these formalities were concluded He set out for Bali's horse sacrifice, which was being performed at Bhrigukaccha (the modern Bharuch) on the northern bank of the supremely holy Narmada River.

"Vamana's overwhelming spiritual radiance so captivated the guests at the sacrifice that they all rose as one to receive Him when He arrived. As was customary, Bali offered Him a gift. Vamana responded by first praising Bali's family and its generosity, beginning with Bali's grandfather Prahlada, because of whom Vishnu appeared in the world as the Man-Lion (*Narasimha*); and then Bali's father, who gave up his life when requested to do so by gods disguised as holy men, though he knew them to be devas. Vamana then asked only for three paces of land.

"King Bali replied, 'This is not much of a request. Ask for enough to maintain you for life.'

"Vamana said, 'No, why should I be greedy? Those who are satisfied with what destiny brings them live happy lives, but those who remain enslaved by their desires cannot be satisfied even with lordship of the whole universe.'

"Venus, ever anxious to protect his disciples, now warned King Bali: 'This diminuitive Brahmana's request for three paces of land alone is bound to be some sort of trick, for He is none other than Vishnu in disguise. You must under no circumstances fulfill this request.'

"But Bali humbly told his guru, 'Great one, when the Preserver of the Cosmos Himself comes to me to beg a boon, how can I refuse Him?'

"Venus grew wrathful when he saw that his disciple was prepared to rebel against his order, and he cursed Bali to be deprived of all his wealth and glory. Bali bowed his head respectfully to his mentor and willingly accepted that curse. Then he prepared to take the traditional oath of donation, the promise that he would indeed give what had been requested.

"But Venus was determined to prevent Bali from losing his kingdom. As you know, your majesty, at the end of the oath of donation water must be poured onto the ground, to seal the promise by making Earth herself a witness. Just as Bali was beginning to mutter the oath Venus shrank himself to miniscule size and entered the spout of the water pot, so that when Bali tried to pour water from the pot onto the ground nothing came out.

"Vamana, of course, knew what was going on. He took a razor-sharp blade of the holy *darbha* grass and stuck it into the spout, poking out one of Venus's eyes thereby. Out onto the ground poured the water, mixed with Venus's blood, to seal the oath.

"Vamana had asked for as much land as He could cover in three steps, and as soon as the oath had been sealed He expanded His dwarf body, larger and larger, until it became the Universal Form. Bali saw within that form the entire cosmos. He saw the Earth in Vishnu's feet, the Sun in His eyes, the Heaven in the crown of His head, the asuras, including himself, in Vishnu's lips, the fire in His face, day and night in His eyelids, water in His semen, the sacrifice in His strides, death in His shadow, the delusive power in His laughter, plants in His hair, and rivers in His blood vessels. Vishnu measured the whole of the earth with His first step, and the heavens were nearly insufficient for His second stride. When the Lord's foot touched the top of heaven, His toenail cracked the Cosmic Egg and down flowed the Waters from Beyond, which became so pure by this contact with the Lord's feet that it is now known as the heavenly River Ganga (the Milky Way).

"For the third step there was nothing left to measure. The other asuras now attacked Vishnu, infuriated at his perpetual duplicity, but Bali stopped them, saying, 'No being can overpower Time, and right now the times are not propitious for us. In the past when Time was in your favor you had defeated the gods many times, and when Time is again in our favor we shall again conquer them. Wait patiently, O asuras, for the coming of that favorable Time.'

"Then Vishnu's mount Garuda bound King Bali with Varuna's noose and said, 'Because you cannot grant what you promised to grant, you must now go to the nether world, sped onward by the curse of your guru.'

"King Bali thereupon said to Lord Vishnu, 'Please place your third step on my head. If I break my oath I will lose my honor, and I would rather lose my life than my honor.' Pleased at Bali's willingness to sacrifice his own life, the Blessed Lord placed His foot firmly atop Bali's head. This was in itself a great boon for Bali, for the touch of the Lord's foot is supremely auspicious, particularly when it falls on one's head.

"It was then that Bali's grandfather Prahlada arrived, that he might also view the Great Lord, Whom he had first seen in the form of the Man-Lion. Prahlada thanked Lord Vishnu for blessing his grandson by depriving him of his wealth, and Lord Vishnu replied, 'I first impoverish whomever I wish to bless. Prosperity makes men proud and overweeningly arrogant, and makes them despise others, including Me. Anyone who enjoys good fortune, by birth or through efforts, in career, health, beauty, longevity, learning, or wealth, and yet remains free from pride and haughtiness does so only by My grace. Because this noble Bali has remained absolutely cool and unruffled even in the face of his utter downfall, I grant him the boon that he will himself become Indra during the next Epoch. Until then he will rule, undying, beneath the earth.'

"Singing the praises of the Blessed Lord, Bali departed for his new realm, accompanied by his grandfather Prahlada. Lord Venus then completed Bali's sacrifice for him, that it might be without blemish. All faults or defects at any rite are corrected by reciting this account of Bali's gift of the universe to the Great Lord.

"And so, your majesty," concluded the pundit of the Nodes, "the devas' victory that they won by embezzling the amrita was merely temporary, and what Vishnu swindled in the beginning had to be begged back later. Even Vishnu's beggary had its own karmic consequences, O king. The workings of karma are very deep!"

Chapter Eleven

The Verdict

The time for King Vikrama to pronounce his judgement had now arrived. Everyone in the court, savants and hangers-on alike, turned expectantly toward their sovereign and made ready to imbibe the nectar of his comments, just as sunflowers swivel toward the sun to best soak up its rays. The king turned over in his mind all that he had heard: the lineages, the unique powers, the accounts of heroism and nobility. Again and again, however, his mind returned to Saturn and to Saturn's extreme cruelty. Finally a peculiar sort of melancholy sprouted in the king's heart, a temporarily impenetrable gloom, and suddenly these words escaped his lips: "Better not to have a son at all than to have one with such a hateful gaze as Saturn's. Since Lord Saturn tormented his own father, who will he not torment? Tell me, O wise ones."

It so happened — fate ordained it — that at that moment Saturn was passing overhead, flying through the skies in his aerial car. Overhearing the king's remark he expeditiously landed his craft and entered the assembly hall. As that tall, emaciated, lame planet, the embodiment of all that is inexorable in life, strode into the palace, the king and everyone present rose at once to their feet. Their voices dried in their mouths by amazement and fear at that terrible sight, they pitched forward at once onto the ground, prostrating rigidly like staves.

There are moments in life which occur just after an inappropriate comment slips from your tongue. You wish, in such moments, to simply recall those last few words — but since, once spoken, speech can never be recalled, that one ill-advised moment may overshadow everything else you ever do for the rest of your life. This was such a moment for King Vikrama. As his heart fell from his mouth to his toes, and was replaced there by the taste of ashes, he put on a brave face and prostrated to Saturn's feet with the utmost reverence. Seating that incarnation of inevitability on his very throne, King Vikrama offered that planet every sort of respect and worshipped him intently, aware as he did so that his fate was already sealed.

When the king was finished, the dark-countenanced Saturn spoke to him in a voice that rang with the calm cold of reality: "O Vikramaditya! You have insulted me in front of the entire assembly without even knowing the extent of my capabilities. Are you aware that Indra and all the other devas quiver in front of me? You know that whomever I get angry with I totally destroy, but what you have not yet comprehended is that I do not allow even a trace of that miscreant to remain; no, not even his name. While flying through the air just now, I sensed you expressing your disgust for me. As it is, I am about to enter the constellation Virgo, which occupies the twelfth house of your horoscope. This means that for seven and a half years you will have no choice but to learn precisely who I am. At the moment, your reason has deviated from its proper course, but soon you will know what my powers really are. I shall remove all these airs of yours, mark my words.

"You do not yet know my prowess. The Moon resides in one constellation of the zodiac for a mere two and a quarter days; the Sun, Mercury and Venus for one month each; Mars for one-and-one-half months; Jupiter for twelve months; and Rahu and Ketu for eighteen months. But I remain for a full thirty months in each sign, and I have delivered prolonged misery even to the great gods themselves. Hear my words with full concentration, O King! When I waylaid Shri Ramachandra, the incarnation of God Himself, He was sent to exile in the forest, and when I accosted Ravana Shri Ramachandra and Lakshmana collected an army, invaded Lanka, killed Ravana, and destroyed his entire family. So now, King Vikrama, you had best prepare for misfortune!"

On completing his tirade Saturn rose straightaway, just as Vikramaditya fell to the ground. Grabbing hold of Saturn's two dark feet in dismay the king cried loudly, "O Lord Saturn! Forgive me for this offense, I beg of you! Have mercy on this poor miserable wretch!" Saturn said, "If I show compassion to you, you will never obtain personal knowledge of my abilities. At least once you must experience my play, otherwise your insolence will not leave you."

Having said this, Saturn reentered his vehicle and sped away through space to his own realm. Burning with immense regret for his grave error in insulting Lord Saturn, King Vikramaditya left his court posthaste, bound for the royal temple, where he worshipped God in his agony.

Then he said to himself, "I have insulted Saturn, that mightily cruel planet, and I will now definitely harvest the fruit of this action. The workings of my own karmas that have brought me to this pass. Did the Moon know, when he stole Jupiter's wife, that it would lead him to suffer Daksha's curse? Did Daksha realize that cursing the Moon would cost him his head?

"But even those who are aware of their actions are not freed from their consequences. Why, the Blessed Vishnu Himself had to return to beg the universe from Bali after He cheated that self-same Bali of the amrita that the asuras had earned at the Churning. What has happened must be endured; what is destined does not change. What is the use in regretting it?" Thinking in this way he had his dinner and lay down to fitfully sleep. On arising the next morning he returned to his court, where he engaged himself in ruling in his habitual manner. Outwardly he seemed normal; within, he fretted day and night over what sort of torment Lord Saturn might have in store for him. A month passed thus.

Chapter Twelve

The Beginning of the Seven and a Half Year Period of Saturn's Dominance of Vikramaditya's Life

Thereafter, when that exceptionally cruel planet Saturn entered the constellation Virgo, the twelfth house of Vikramaditya's horoscope (as counted from his Moon), a well-educated astrologer came to visit that heroic monarch. He said, "Great King! The particularly severe planet known as Saturn has now entered the twelfth house from your Moon, and your seven-and-a-half-year period of Saturnian dolor has begun. You have spoken about this planet in ordinary terms, but he is acclaimed as *Mahakrura* ('Megacruel') in all the three worlds. Now is the time to perform worship, to give alms, and to have mantras recited for you, that you may appease Saturn and escape from his tortures.

"Select a learned and devout Brahmana and have him recite Saturn's mantra for you 23,000 times. After the mantra recitation is finished, have 5,750 offerings made into the sacred fire. Donate black gram, black cloth, iron, and oil to a Brahmana, and feed Brahmanas. Wear a pure blue sapphire on your body. If you have mantras recited for you and you feed some Brahmanas, and if you revere and worship those Brahmanas who perform these rituals for you as if they were Saturn himself, Saturn will become peaceable. When he has become satisfied by these means, Saturn will protect you during your Seven-and-a-Half in the same way that he would protect his own son."

King Vikramaditya answered, "I will certainly attempt to propitiate Saturn by offering abundant alms and by arranging for all due worship to be performed, but I am not at all confident that he will become pleased with me. If as soon as he was born he harassed his mother and father, then what good things will he do for anyone else? Whatever is written in one's fate happens with certainty, and there is no escaping from it. Please return to your home." Saying this the king bade farewell to the pundit.

One day shortly thereafter Saturn took the form of a rich merchant and arrived in Ujjayini to sell horses. O listeners! The storyteller says, pay attention! Many rich men came to that merchant to purchase horses, and when King Vikrama heard of this he ordered his master of horse to go buy some excellent ones. Obedient to his king's order, the master of horse visited the merchant's stable and selected a horse with a good pedigree. When he heard its price, he was so stunned that he ran to tell the king, and King Vikrama was so stunned that he came to see those horses for himself. Saturn, in the merchant's disguise, showed the king horse after horse, and the king examined them all, one by one. When the king asked the merchant the horses' price, Saturn replied, "Your majesty! After you have ridden a horse and decided that you like him, only then will I tell you his price."

The king liked a horse named Sarang, so he mounted a rider with a whip on Sarang's back and took him to the nearby parkland for a trial. The rider rode him well, and the king was pleased. By this time the merchant had brought forward another horse named Akhlakh, and he said to the king, "This horse's price is one hundred thousand silver rupees. I know that such a price has never yet been asked for a horse, but if you will but mount him personally and ride him a bit, you will know precisely what is his gait and quality. Then you will be able to judge his value for yourself." The king then mounted the horse and took him to the parkland. After cantering him a bit, he said, to no one in particular, "This horse is indeed high-spirited and swift."

As soon as these words left the king's mouth Akhlakh gave a tremendous leap and sailed into the sky at breakneck speed. The more he leapt the further they flew, as the king held on for dear life. Finally, they penetrated a dense jungle in a faraway land and landed on the bank of a river. The king collected himself sufficiently to jump off the horse, who immediately disappeared from view, as did the river. Seeing neither the horse nor the river, and surrounded by impenetrable forest, King Vikrama was overwhelmed with boundless grief. He sadly asked himself, "Where shall I go now, and what shall I do?"

The Sun promptly set, and darkness spread in all directions with such dispatch that it soon became impossible for the king to see any path through the dismal woods. He had no choice but to pass the night beneath a tree until, by the light of the next morning's dawn, he emerged with great difficulty from the forest, assailed grievously by hunger and thirst. At that moment a cowherd came along, who gave the king some water and showed him the direct road to the nearest town, which happened to be the city of Tamalinda, about twenty miles away. Sighing gravely and filled with a full measure of the trepidation of presentiment, King Vikrama wearily set out upon the road, advancing slowly toward his fate.

Back in Ujjayini the populace had waited patiently, but when, by nightfall, the king had not descended from the sky, they descended into hopelessness. The whole city was drowned in immense sorrow over the sudden disappearance of their beloved lord, and expressions of bone-deep anguish spread among the people like an ache spreads in an affected limb.

The morning after the king's disappearance, the horse merchant waylaid the prime minister and said, "Now please pay me for my horse." The prime minister responded, "When the king returns he will pay you." He then sent men in all directions to search for the sovereign, but since they could get no hint of where he had gone, the prime minister finally had to pay the merchant one hundred thousand silver rupees, which was the price he had mentioned to the king. Pocketing the money, Saturn became invisible.

King Vikrama had meanwhile slowly made his way to the city of Tamalinda, and on entering it he encountered its shopping bazaar. He sat to rest for some time in front of a trader's shop. It so happened that the trader's sales during that period of time were double his usual take. Noting this the shopkeeper thought to himself, "Here must certainly be a very lucky man," and he greeted King Vikrama with great respect. Seating the king in his shop, the trader said to him, "Please clean your mouth, hands and feet, and then bathe, and then come to my home for your meal. What caste do you belong to, where is your home, and what is your name?"

The king replied, "I am by birth a Kshatriya, and my homeland is far from here. Wandering, wandering I reached this city, and seeing your shop, I stopped here for a moment to rest."

The merchant responded, "You have spoken very well. However it is that you have come, please come with me now to my home," and so saying he escorted the king to a well-appointed mansion not far distant. After King Vikrama had bathed and performed his daily worship, the merchant seated him with great pomp and had served to him a delicious meal of varied delicacies containing the full complement of all six tastes. After eating until their bellies were full, the two men washed their hands and faces, and began to chew betel nuts and leaves.

It so happened that the merchant's daughter, by name Alolika ('Unagitated'), was searching for a man of her liking to marry. Her father had also searched diligently but had as yet found no appropriate man until today, when fate had unexpectedly shipped to his shop this fortunate man, who seemed a most appropriate match for his girl. The merchant therefore called for his daughter, and told her, "Alolika! I have today located a suitable man for you. Garland him (to signify that she had selected him for a husband), and marry him."

The girl replied, "All right, father, but I will marry him only after I have tested him. I must know the extent of his wisdom, cleverness, and depth before I will wed him. After evening falls, send that guest that of yours to sleep in my art room. I will test him there, and if he passes my test I will marry him."

The merchant consequently sent King Vikrama to his daughter's art room. When the king stepped inside the room he was struck first by the walls, which were covered with a variety of pictures of elephants, horses, and birds. In the middle of the room, a canopied bed was laid out on which was spread a velvet mattress covered with a white coverlet with embroidered pillows on both sides. In the center of the ceiling was a pearl chandelier from which canopies of pearls extended in all directions. Lamps threw a brightness like that of moonlight over the whole scene, and garlands of roses distributed their fragrance throughout the room when struck by the breeze. Near the bed was an ivory table on which were arranged flagons of rose water and a variety of perfume essences.

Seeing the room's unparalleled ornamentation, King Vikrama thought, "O ho! What country is this, and what beauty is this? The gait of karma is very perplexing; no one is able to know it. All this seems to me to be one of Lord Saturn's illusions, something that he has arranged in order to deceive me; no, there is no doubt about this at all. Even the merchant's daughter must be part of Lord Saturn's illusion. Now I will see what happens next." He then got into bed, covered his head, and pretended to sleep.

He pretended to sleep because he couldn't sleep. How could he sleep? With Saturn's harsh gaze on him and the seven and a half years of Saturn's influence clinging to him, the king lay in bed with the covers pulled over his head, smothered with thoughts of impending calamities.

While he was in this state the merchant's daughter, bedecked with the sixteen varieties of adornment, entered the chamber. A precious pearl and diamond necklace embellished her delicate neck, about which fell her hair which was crowded with pearls. In her nose sat a diamond stud. The divine beauty of her body shone through her rich raiment like a flash of lightning illumines the golden clouds of evening. With great hopes she entered that room, which resounded happily with the jinglings of her anklets, but when, perfumes oozing from her pores, she approached the bed she saw that the king was asleep, his head covered with the sheet.

Now Alolika was well-versed in testing prospective suitors, and she was cunning in the art of joining herself with prospective bridegrooms. She tried to rouse the king from sleep by sprinkling him lightly with saffron water, but since the king's sleep was but a pretence how could he be roused? A sleeping man may be made to speak, but a wakeful man will keep quiet.

The merchant's daughter tried for three full hours, to no avail, to awaken her intended. Finally she hung her pearl necklace over a handy peg and, heaving a earnest sigh, she lay both her throbbing heart and her quivering body down at the king's side. Shortly thereafter she was overcome with sleep.

Thereupon the king pulled the covers off his face, and thought, "People call me courageous and heroic and say that my mind is ever intent on assisting others. Day and night I dread sinning. Here is this young maiden whom I will not marry; how can I explain my situation to her? If the wise regard it to be a sin even to speak with an unwed girl in private, how much more of a sin would it be to actually touch her?"

While thinking in this fashion King Vikrama witnessed a wonder: A painted swan in one of the pictures on the wall came to life. It then dropped from its wall to the floor, waddled over to the peg where Alolika's necklace was dangling, and started to eat it. The king marvelled greatly at this mischance and thought, "This event is going to be a great source of misery for me; it is going to cost me a lot. If I take the necklace away from the swan I will lose my reputation for never refusing someone what they ask for, since refusal causes misery; but if I let the swan eat it unobstructedly, a charge of thievery will be laid against me. Well, let me be charged with theft, but I will not destroy my reputation for generosity by taking the necklace away from the swan." Thinking thus, the king finally fell asleep.

In the morning the maiden arose and said to herself, "This man that my father procured for me is an impotent fool who is sleeping even now."

Chapter Thirteen

King Vikrama Is Falsely Accused of Theft, and Is Put to Work on the Oil Mill

Grumbling to herself thus, she strode over to the peg to retrieve the necklace she had hung there, and when she did not find it, she roughly woke the king and said to him, "Now I see! You are in fact a mega-cheat, not a limp nincompoop. You stole my necklace and then went to sleep; but you will not be able to digest my necklace. Give it back to me, and then hit the road."

The king replied, "Sister! I did not take your necklace. I was sleeping here, and you are accusing me falsely."

Hearing this the outraged girl stormed off to her father and yelled at him, "Father! You have really found a fit husband for me. He is a mega-cheat and a thief, pervaded with the talent for robbery. During the night he stole my necklace and has hidden it somewhere." Hearing this the merchant rushed to the king and inveighed, "O dunderhead! I gave you shelter in my house, fed you the choicest foods, and suggested that you marry my daughter. And this is how you pay me back? What have you done?"

King Vikrama replied, "I did not steal your necklace. It is the power of my ill-fortune which has landed me in this soup."

On hearing this the merchant lost his temper and said to his servant, "Take this rogue, tie him up, and give him a good beating. Maybe then he will admit to his crime, because it doesn't look as if he will admit to it without a whipping."

The servant tied King Vikrama soundly with a rope and gave him a good bashing, during which the merchant kept shouting, "Thrash him soundly, for only then will he admit to the theft and produce the necklace. Compassion is inappropriate here."

The merchant's servants battered the king so thoroughly that King Vikrama, acutely distressed by this tightening of Saturn's noose around his neck, cried out, "O merchant! I don't know anything at all about this necklace. You are beating me fruitlessly! You have checked my body and inspected my clothes, but nothing has been found. Have a little compassion for me! I did not take your necklace, I don't have your necklace, I don't know anything about your necklace. You are beating me in vain."

The merchant then said to his servants, "This is some seasoned thief we have here, for in spite of all this pounding he still refuses to talk. Now take him to the king! When the king's justice has taught him a good lesson he will produce the necklace."

The merchant's servants accordingly bound both of King Vikrama's hands, and led him into the presence of King Chandrasena, where they told their king the story of the necklace in full detail. Then King Chandrasena said to King Vikramaditya, "O you scoundrel! Bring out this necklace straightaway and return it to the merchant!"

King Vikramaditya said, "I did not steal the necklace, and I do not know anything about the necklace. You have a wrong idea about this necklace, about which I know absolutely nothing. All this trouble is occuring because the planet Saturn is angry with me. I do not steal, but if you still doubt me, all right, then, have it your way: I am a thief; please show compassion to me."

On hearing this King Chandrasena rose like a fire blazing up and said, "You impostor! You still will not admit to your crime? You stole from this merchant and are pretending not to have done so? Guards! Cut off this knave's hands and feet and throw him out of town and see that he gets no food or water from today onwards."

Saturn had turned King Chandrasena's mind topsy-turvy, making him believe that King Vikramaditya was a thief, and preventing him from taking the least cognizance of King Vikrama's pleas.

King Chandrasena's servants, following their master's orders, then took King Vikrama out of town to the executioner, who chopped off his hands and feet. At the moment they were hewn away a sudden wave of woe rolled through the city. Mutilated, King Vikrama writhed in agony, screaming from the pain of his wounds, dying slowly, but the heartless servants of King Chandrasena did nothing to relieve his pain. After taking King Vikrama to a desolate wood and dumping him there, they returned to their king, who asked them, "O my minions! What is the condition of that burglar? Is he dead yet, or still living?"

The lackeys brayed, "He should be dead very soon. How will he live without feet or hands? He is dying a miserable death in extreme pain, bleeding heavily, and we have stopped everyone from giving him food or drink. He can't last long now. The paroxysms he feels in the stumps of his hands and feet are causing him to suffer like a fish out of water." The people of the city of Tamalinda had compassion for King Vikrama, but since King Chandrasena had strictly forbidden anyone to give him food or water, everyone was exceedingly afraid to provide him any assistance, lest they too end up in his pitiable state.

But King Vikrama survived; if he had died, how would Saturn have been able to continue to harass him? After a month passed, the planet Saturn at last felt some compassion for King Vikrama. Saturn then created compassion in the heart of King Chandrasena, who suddenly one day asked his servants, "What condition is that thief in?"

The flunkeys replied, "Great King! He is still alive, but he is in terrible shape. Without any food or drink he is hovering on the point of death."

The king ordered his men, "For today onwards have mercy on him, and give him food and drink!"

Following the king's orders, his servants began to provide Vikramaditya with nourishment. The townspeople began to care for him, and served him with food and drink. In only a short time the pain from his hands and feet subsided, and his strength returned. But he was crippled, and to move about without hands and feet caused him great difficulty and great agony.

In this way, two arduous years passed for the wretched King Vikrama, until one day a woman who had been born in Ujjayini and who had returned there to visit her family passed by in a palanquin. She was the daughter-in-law of an oil merchant, returning to her father-in-law's house in Tamalinda. As she neared the city she spied

King Vikrama sitting underneath a tree, and saw that his hands and feet had been severed.

Dumfounded by this sight she stopped the palanquin and rushed over to King Vikrama, saying, "Great King! What has brought you to this pass? How long have you been here?"

King Vikramaditya told her, "O chaste wife! All of this comes as a result of my previous karmas. It is because my stars have turned in their courses that I have been ravaged. Lord Saturn became angry with me, and put me into this miserable predicament. There is no escape from enduring the consequences of one's karmas. O sister! Is all well in my Ujjayini?"

Tears came to the woman's eyes as she answered, "Great King! There is great happiness in the city of Ujjayini, but seeing you in this state my heart is greatly stricken. As you say, there is no escape from enjoying the fruits of one's previous karmas; what was to happen has happened. Now get up and sit in my palanquin, and come with me to my house." With great difficulty King Vikrama was able to seat himself in the palanquin, and the woman then transported him to the oil presser's home.

Fear gripped the oil merchant as he watched the crippled ruler emerge from the palanquin, and he said to his daughter-in-law, "Daughter-in-law! Why have you brought this trouble into our home? Our king had this thief's hands and feet chopped off and expelled him from our city, strictly ordering no one to assist him. If you give him refuge in our home our king will loot our household and will imprison us."

After listening patiently the girl replied soothingly, "O my father-in-law! Don't fear. This is King Vikramaditya of Ujjayini, who because of his own ill fortune has fallen into this condition of extreme adversity. He ruled Ujjayini with great righteousness and statesmanship, but because of the adverse position of the planets he has been ruined. He is a wish-fulfilling jewel fallen onto a rubbish heap, and today he has fallen into our hands."

Hearing this, the oilman was astonished and he offered King Vikramaditya every token of respect. He kept the king in his home and pondered over how to tactfully explain this situation to King Chandrasena.

The next day the oil trader went to the court of King Chandrasena and appealed to him oleaginously: "Great King! Remember that thief who, after having his hands and feet chopped off, you had thrown out of town? Well, I feel sorry for him, so if you give the word I will keep him in my house and feed him." Chandrasena carefully considered the oilman's entreaty before giving his assent as requested.

Now fearless, the oil presser returned home, where Vikramaditya told him, "Don't let anyone know that I am Vikramaditya, and don't speak about this matter to anyone." The oilman agreed to this,and said to King Vikrama, "From now on, you should sit always atop my oil press and press out the oil, and I will keep you supplied with food and clothing."

Vikramaditya, who had been the ruler of Ujjayini until he fell under Saturn's sway and was brought low, agreed to this proposal and began to sit atop the man's oil mill all day long, pressing out the oil. See the play of destiny! Day and night the disfigured King Vikrama sat atop the oil mill, driving the oxen on as they turned the mill's axle, feeling tremendously indebted to the oil trader for the food, clothing, and shelter that was provided to him. In this way five more years passed.

Those who want to know what happened next should now listen with one-pointed attention: As time went by, it became King Vikrama's wont to daily sing, to pass the time as he herded the oxen in their circular route around the mill. King Vikrama, who was a talented musician, knew all the classical *ragas* (musical modes), and one day, as he sat atop the mill, he began to sing the Raga Dipaka in a beautiful voice. He sang his heart out until, all of a sudden, the potency of the melody combined with the force of his singing to cause all the lamps in the city to spontaneously ignite.

It so happened that Princess Padmasena, King Chandrasena's daughter, was standing on the palace's balcony at the very moment of that ignition, and she marvelled when she saw lamps flare abruptly into life in every house in town, as if it were Dipavali (the Festival of Lights). She asked her servants, "Who has caused all these lamps to be lit in our city today? Today is not Dipavali, and there is no grand marriage or other festival. Go and investigate! Find out who has caused these lamps to blaze." Just then Vikramaditya completed his rendering of Raga Dipaka, and each and every one of the lamps just as unexpectedly went out.

Then he began the vocal elaboration of the Raga Shri. Hearing this the princess said, "Who is this musical maestro performing anonymously among us? Are any of my servants here? Go find out where that singer is, and hurry!" Obedient to her command, the princess's maidservants scoured the city until they came to the oil dealer's house, where they saw, sitting on the oil press, the crippled Vikramaditya with his defective arms and legs, singing masterfully. Seeing him they scurried back to the palace and told the princess, "Do you know that robber whose hands and feet were chopped off and who was thrown out of town by your father more than seven years ago? Well, that invalid is sitting in the oil miller's house, pressing out the oil and singing that song."

The princess then told her maidservants, "Go quickly and summon him here."

One brave serving girl had the temerity to object: "If we bring him here now, the king will be furious with us. Let us first insert this suggestion into the king's ear, so that he will not take offense when the cripple arrives here."

The princess retorted: "There is no use whatsoever in inserting anything into my father's ear. I will inform him later. Now go and invite this artist to the palace, for my mind has become attached to him." The servant girls ran to the oilpresser's house and, after taking the oilman's permission, invited Vikramaditya to visit the princess. He tried to decline the invitation, suspicious that Saturn might not have finished with him yet, but when the girls insisted, he allowed them to escort him to the palace of King Chandrasena.

There he met the princess, who seated him in a seat of honor and said, "You who are a connoisseur of ragas, please sing one of them now, and satiate my ears. Your throat is intensely sweet, and your knowledge of music is total. You must be, in fact, some celestial musician."

Thereafter King Vikramaditya, in the crippled form created when his feet and hands were severed, spent his days in the princess's palace at her command, pleasing her mightily by singing for her, in a sweet voice, many different ragas and *raginis* (female ragas), each appropriate for the time of day or night that he sang them. During the course of these concerts the period of his Seven-and-a-Half came to an end.

Meanwhile, the princess had determined to wed King Vikrama only, if she was to wed, and embarked on a hunger fast for this purpose. Her handmaidens tattled on her to the queen, who sashayed into her daughter's apartments to enquire the cause of her misery. The princess told her mother, "Ma, I am determined to marry the man who has recently begun singing in my palace. I have chosen him, and I shall marry no other."

Immensely offended by these foolish words, her mother replied, "Daughter, have you gone insane? Your destiny is to marry some eminent prince. Your station in life is as far from that of this limbless wretch as the sky is distant from the earth. Stop all this foolish prattle and be a sensible girl." But her daughter replied, "I shall not break my vow. This man alone shall be my husband."

At this the queen began to worry that perhaps the princess's obsession would not be so easy to lift, and so she proceeded directly to consult with her husband the king, who at that very moment was asking his courtiers, "Why is the princess's palace filled with beautiful ragas and raginis all day and all night long nowadays? Who is serenading her, and why is the princess listening?"

The courtiers, fearful of their necks should they spill the beans, all folded their hands in front of them and said politely, "Great King! We know nothing about this. When you visit the palace of Princess Padmasena please do verify this yourself. We can say absolutely nothing on the subject of the princess. Please see it with your own eyes, and then do that which you feel is appropriate."

At this moment his wife stormed into the room and told King Chandrasena all that had passed between her and their daughter.

The king rose at once to his feet and marched directly to his daughter's palace, where he announced to her, "Daughter! What you have spoken of doing does not reflect favorably on a princess's dignity. This man is a thief, and was punished with dismemberment at my command. Forget this youthful infatuation, and I shall even today send my messengers to far-off lands to find you an appropriate, capable, handsome prince to be your groom."

The princess eyed her father coolly and replied, "Father, if you speak to me any more on this matter I shall surely relinquish my life, but I shall not take another husband." The king examined her closely, and saw that her mind was made up. Filled with anger, he said to her, "If such a fate is written in your destiny, what can I do about it? Who can change the lines of one's fate?"

Realizing that he had no alternative, he agreed to the match and with a heavy heart returned slowly to his palace, where he lay on his bed in misery. After tossing and turning for what seemed an eternity, he fell into a deep sleep. In a dream he saw King Vikrama whole again.

Chapter Fourteen

The Lifting of the Seven-and-a-Half and the Pleasing of Lord Saturn

King Vikrama, who knew nothing of the drama that was playing out in the palace, had begun to worry: "When shall I go to Ujjayini and return to ruling my kingdom? There is no misery left for me to undergo, and still Lord Saturn does not show me his grace. Would that he would grace me now!"

As King Vikrama sat thinking thus, Lord Saturn was filled with compassion for him, and came and stood before him. That powerful planet said, "O King Vikrama! Do you recognize me? I am Lord Saturn. Have you been singed by the blaze of my power? Tell me how much suffering you have now endured by insulting me in your court."

On seeing and hearing the almighty Saturn, King Vikrama attempted to rise to his feet but, being footless, he tumbled promptly to the ground, so he rolled handlessly over to Saturn's feet in order to make his obeisance. Then said the mighty Lord Saturn: "O King Vikrama! Bravo for your patience. You have survived great miseries; now request your heart's desire from me."

Vikramaditya, in a voice choked with emotion, replied, "O Great Ruler! You have awarded me immense distress. Give me now this boon, that you will never again trouble anyone else as you have troubled me. O Compassionate Lord Saturn! This is my heart's desire. No one else could endure the miseries that I have withstood. I wish that this should happen to no one else, ever."

When he heard this Saturn responded with, "Bravo, King Vikrama! Well done! You could have asked for your hands and feet to be returned to you, but you feel the pain of others in your heart, and, renouncing your own selfishness, you asked for a boon for everyone else. You are verily a remover of others' troubles, for you want to save all beings from suffering. I am very pleased with this sort of benevolent attitude. I am in truth so pleased that I give you this boon: May your hands and feet be again as they were before, and may you regain your previous luster!" In the instant that these words were spoken King Vikrama's hands and feet were once again whole, and he was as handsome as before.

Then Vikramaditya placed his head on Lord Saturn's feet and said, "O Lord Saturn! I bow to you profoundly again and again for having shown me your grace, and again I request this boon from you, that you never subject any living being of any species to this sort of torment."

Chapter Fifteen

Saturn's Stories of How He Administered Misery to His Guru and Others

Lord Saturn then said to King Vikrama, "O Vikramaditya! I have not tormented you in the least. Torment is what I gave to my guru. Can you even compare your misery with his? I have also tortured the devas and the asuras and filled them with woe. If you will listen carefully to their stories, you may begin to comprehend my abilities.

"One morning I went to my guru with folded hands. Saluting him, I said, 'Guru Maharaj! I bow to you.'

"Guruji said, 'Yes, my child? Why have you come to me today? Tell me what I can do for you.'

"I said, 'I am thinking of passing over your Moon.'

"My guru, naturally, got the shock of his lifetime, and said, 'My son! Have pity on me, and don't enter the constellation where my Moon sits at all.'

"'But Maharaj,' I explained to him patiently, 'that is my duty. I cannot shirk my duty. I cannot spare anyone, not even you. If you are repulsed by the idea of giving me refuge, well then, O Compassionate Lord! How will anyone else allow me to affect them, or obey me? Everyone will insult me. No, I am going to turn my gaze on you within a very short time. That is the way things are ordained. I may be your pupil, but for now, please ask me for grace.'

"Hearing this my Guru Maharaj said with alarm, 'How long will your gaze be on me?'

"I told him, 'Seven and a half years.'

"'Impossible!' he sputtered.

"So I told him, 'At least agree to let me reside with you for five years, or at the very least for two and a half years!' But he was not ready to agree to this either, nor would he agree to seven and a half months, or even seven and a half days.

"I then had the thought that it was inappropriate for me as a disciple to serve up exceptional misery for my guru. A guru is as compassionate as a mother, which is why the guru is always worthy of worship. Realizing that failure to comply with my guru's request would make me fall into hell myself, I made obeisance to my guru's feet, and in a humble voice I supplicated, 'O Lord Mentor! I, the planet Saturn, am pleased with you, so, Guru Maharaj! Ask! Ask for a boon!'

"My guru said to me, 'O Saturn! If you are pleased with me, then I ask this boon: Show me the compassion not to enter my body at all.'

"I responded: 'If I spare you, then no one in the world will respect me. But I will give you this boon: I will stay in your Moon's constellation only seven and a half *praharas* (22 1/2 hours).'

"He said, 'Fine, O Saturn! You may stay in my Moon sign for one and a quarter *praharas* (3 hours and 45 minutes).' He commanded me in this way, thinking to himself, 'How will my disciple be able to torment me if I pass these few hours bathing and meditating?'

"But I came to know what he was thinking, and his arrogance so hardened my heart that it steeled my resolve. 'Very good, O Great Guru!' I said to myself. 'Because you have decided to try to cheat me you will now have to see what sort of prowess I possess and what wonders I can perform!'

"When the time arrived for me to bother my guru he thought to himself, 'I believe that I shall go down to the Plane Where People Die (Earth), where the river Ganga flows, and take my bath there. By the time I finish bathing my period of punishment will be over.' So he headed for Earth and the river Ganga.

"Taking the form of a melon merchant, I met him along his way, and when my shadow fell on him, changes began to occur in his body and his mind. I showed him two small watermelons, which I cut open slightly to show how good they were. Seeing their sticky red juice run down, my guru became pleased with those melons. He gave me two small coins for them, put them into his bag, and continued onward to the Ganga. I disappeared. After bathing in the River Ganga my guru filled his waterpot with Ganga water and, carrying those two watermelons in his bag, headed for the nearby town.

"Now, the sons of the king and the prime minister of that city were of the same age and were devoted to each other. The day before they had gone out hunting together, and I had caused them to lose their way. They became completely lost in the jungle, and when they did not return home by nightfall, the king began to worry and ordered his soldiers to search for them. One of the search parties came across my guru and noticed the bulging bag he was carrying under his arm.

"When the soldiers asked my guru, 'Great sage! What is in your bag?' he replied, 'Two watermelons for me to dine on later.' But the soldiers remonstrated, 'Then why is blood dripping from your bag, O butcher! Are you a Brahmana or a *Brahmarakshasa* (a type of evil spirit)? Show us what is in that bag forthwith!'

"When my guru heard this he asked himself, 'What are they talking about?' As he said to them, 'Oh, it is just watermelon juice,' he looked down to the bag — and saw that it was indeed bloody, and that blood was dripping from it, drop by drop, for I had meanwhile changed those melons into the severed heads of the sons of the king and his prime minister.

'Then the soldiers snatched the bag from my guru's arm, and when they opened it they found the heads of the two young men they were searching for. Seeing them, the soldiers were instantly filled with disgust, and screamed at my guru, 'You villain! Now we see that you are an executioner in the guise of a Brahmana, and that you have no trace of compassion within you.'

"Then those soldiers bound my guru and, flogging him at every step, marched him back to the palace, where they told the king, 'This base, vile man has murdered your son and the prime minister's son!'

"When the troops displayed the severed heads to the king he swooned, and fell to the floor. When he came to, he said to himself, 'O my Lord God! You couldn't even spare my only son. Ah! Ah! This is no Brahmana; he is poison incarnate, who has slain my sinless son. Go out, you men, from this city and impale this ghoul on a sharp stake; then bring me a report.' The soldiers obediently dragged my guru out to the execution ground, hammering him all the way, and set a tall pointed iron stake firmly upright in that ground, preparing to impale him.

"Meanwhile, in another part of the palace the prince's wife, on hearing of his death, decided to immolate herself on his funeral pyre. Sorrow spread through the town on the heels of the news, and outside of town a crowd gathered to see the prince's murderer. They rained stones and clods of dirt on my guru, reviling him thus: 'This is a fiend in Brahmana's clothes; otherwise how could this rapscallion perform such a terrible deed?'

"My guru was of course extrememly depressed at this unexpected, overwhelming reversal of fortune and had not the least idea of what to do about it. So there he stood, eyes downcast, staring distractedly at the ground, when one of the king's executioners came up to him and said, 'Great sage, prepare yourself to enjoy the fruits of your evil deeds, and mount this stake.'

"Hearing the word 'stake' my guru began to quake uncontrollably, and he said to the executioner, 'Wait for just a few minutes before you impale me, and if I am saved I will give you ten thousand silver coins. What will happen if you wait a couple of minutes before you skewer me?'

"Dread of the stake had shaken my guru out of his trance of confusion, and he had realized that my agreed-upon time to torture him was almost up. It was because he knew that once my gaze left him completely he would automatically escape that he pleaded so persistently for a postponement. His entreaties eventually created a modicum of compassion within the king's servants, and they agreed to delay the execution by a few minutes. Being a renunciate my guru had no money, but he promised it anyway, just to save himself.

"By this time the three and three-quarters hours of my gaze had expired, and the sons of the king and the prime minister straggled into the palace, where they stood before the king to salute him. Tears of joy filled the king's eyes, and he commanded a fleet messenger to hie to the execution ground, saying: 'Tell my men not to impale that Brahmana; instead, bring him back to me.'

"The messenger flew to the execution ground to deliver the message, as a consequence of which my guru was marched back to the palace, still trussed up like a prisoner. Once there he blessed the king, and narrated to him the whole story. Thereupon the king in a voice choked with emotion, 'O Lord Guru! It was from ignorance that I laid on you the crime of my son's murder and ordered you to be impaled. For this mistake I crave your forgiveness. My son has returned alive from his hunting trip, but not before the intoxication of my authority and wealth made me sentence you to death without thinking of what a great sin it is to slay a sage. Had you died, that evil karma would have destroyed both me and my kingdom and would have sent me to hell. Great sage! Forgive such an unthinking reprobate as I.' So saying the king sat my guru on his throne and stood there before him, folding his own two hands respectfully in front of his chest.

"Then my guru said, 'O king! You have commited no fault whatsoever. All of this has been Lord Saturn's illusion. It is he who caused both of us this great misery.' When the king called for my guru's bag and opened it again he found — two watermelons. After having my guru well bathed and his body anointed with fragrant unguents, and having his wounds attended to, the king sat him on a gilded stool and worshipped him, following which he was fed many and varied delicious morsels. My guru was then given new clothes and ornaments, and his bag was filled with ten thousand silver coins. His body creaking from all the beatings he had received, my guru met the executioner as he left the palace gates, and handed over all his compensation to that butcher, in fulfillment of his promise. Further down the road I met him, and bowing down flat upon the ground in salute I said, 'Lord Guru! Tell me your news!'

"Guru said, 'O Lord Saturn! That three and three-fourths hours of your gaze have shattered my bones; who knows what would have happened to me had you spent seven and a half years oppressing my Moon! You have obliged me immensely. You are the most terrible of all the planets, and those whom you seize you torment mercilessly. That which was to happen has happened; but never give anyone this sort of misery again. I have been able to withstand this torture, but no one else could have withstood it. I shall take an oath from you right now that you will not submit anyone else to this degree of anguish.'

"I replied, 'O Guru! Anyone who is free from arrogance has nothing to fear from me, but everyone who harbors arrogance within will have to suffer as you have suffered. Lord Guru! You tried to be too smart; I had to display my powers to you because of your arrogance. Now pardon this child of yours; I shall never offend you in this way again.' Having spoken in this way, I took guru's permission to return to my own world."

Hearing this story of how Saturn had harried his own guru, King Vikramaditya was filled with wonder. Then Lord Saturn said to him, "O King! I have not spared any of the gods from torment. Shiva, Ramachandra, Krishna, and Indra are some of the gods and Nala, Yudhisthira and Harischandra a few of the kings whom I have tortured. They now know my prowess and my power."

Shiva and Saturn

“Once I went to Lord Shiva and told Him, ‘O Great God! I want to come and stay with You.’

“Shiva replied, ‘What is the use of you coming to stay with Me? But still, if you insist, first let Me know when you plan to do so, and only then enter Me.’ I agreed. Two days later I came to Him at His home in the city of Benaras and said, ‘Now I am about to enter Your body.’

“On hearing this Shiva jumped at once into the great river Ganga which flows through Benaras, and remained there in samadhi for seven and a half years. After that period was over He emerged, and said to me, ‘O Saturn! What could you do to Me?’

“I told Him, ‘O Great God! Although Your writ runs in the three worlds, from fear of me You hid yourself beneath the surface of the Ganga in samadhi for seven and a half years; would You call that “doing nothing to You?”’

“Lord Shiva then saluted me, and thanked me, saying, ‘Your power is indeed profound. You are without doubt the intensest of the planets, and the average man can never survive your punishment intact.’

“When I began to cross Lord Ramachandra’s Moon He was forced to live as a hermit in the forest for fourteen long years. O King Vikrama! Have you seen my power yet? Although Ramachandra was an incarnation of God Himself, my torments still made Him miserable.

Ravana and Saturn

"I also displayed my talents to the likes of the ten-headed Ravana; listen, O Vikrama! After Ravana had succeeded in gaining control of all the Nine Planets, he installed us face down on the nine steps which led up to his throne. Each morning when he would ascend his throne, he would step firmly on the back of each one of us, causing us great anguish and insult.

"One day the Divine Narada came to Ravana's house and, seeing me and the other planets lying face down on the steps of the throne, said to me, 'O Saturn! You are the mightiest and the most terrible of the planets, but even though Ravana has insulted you to this extent you can do nothing about it. Why is this?'

"I replied, 'Because I am face down my gaze cannot fall on Ravana, so I cannot affect him. If someone can turn me over onto my back then I will show you what I can do. Advise him to turn me over, and I will do the rest.'

"Narada understood, and went to search out Ravana. After praising him to the skies Narada ended by saying, "But there is one thing here that I don't like."

"Ravana indignantly asked, "And what might that be?"

"Narada replied, 'O Ravana! You have the Nine Planets lying face down. Why not turn them over, so that instead of stepping on their backs each day as you mount your throne you can step on their chests, and see the discomfiture on their faces?'

"Ravana liked this suggestion. As soon as he turned us planets over onto our backs, and arranged us neatly on steps leading up to his throne, my gaze fell on him, and his mind became perverted. Within the space of a few months he kidnapped Sita. Then Rama invaded Lanka and killed him, and his sons and grandsons were all slaughtered — all as the result of my influence on him during his Seven-and-a-Half.

Others Tormented by Saturn

"It was in this fashion that a Seven-and-a-Half came over King Harischandra. This event so perplexed his mind that he left his kingdom for Benaras, where he was sold into slavery. His wife was also sold, and he had to pass through seven and a half years of tribulations. His wife Taramati became the servant of a Brahmana, and he was employed by the ruler of the cremation ground to strip the corpses of their clothes and valuables before they were consigned to the flames. All this was my play.

"Likewise, King Nala had to experience a Seven-and-a-Half, which caused him and his Queen Damayanti to leave their kingdom and encounter profound grief as they wandered in the forests. All this was due to my power, for I ruin those on whom I gaze cruelly.

"I also beset King Indra, the lord of the gods. When my cruel gaze fell on him he got the idea of seducing Gautama Muni's wife Ahalya, and when Gautama Muni discovered this rape he cursed Indra to be covered with one thousand vaginas.

"When I beleaguered the Moon, he stole Jupiter's wife, and that black mark was laid against his name. And what of Vasistha, whose hundred sons were slain; or the Rishi Parashara, who copulated with the fishergirl Matsyagandha ('Fish-Odor'); or Arjuna and his four brothers, who had to wander in the forest for many years; or the one hundred Kauravas who were slain by the Pandavas? All these incidents were the fruits of their karmas, which I served up to them during their various Seven-and-a-Half periods. Even Shri Krishna Himself had to suffer contumely during His Seven-and-a-Half, O Vikaramaditya! when He was accused of stealing the Syamantaka gem."

Vikramaditya said, "Please tell me the story of how it happened that Shri Krishna was accused of theft."

Krishna and the Syamantaka Gem

Lord Saturn began: "O King Vikrama! The Divine Narayana incarnated in Vasudeva's house as Shri Krishna to relieve Earth of her burdens. Shri Krishna had the divine architect Tvashtri construct the golden city of Dwaraka for Him, and there He lived with His sixteen thousand women, each in her own beautiful mansion. He even brought the Parijataka tree down from heaven to please His wives. It is said that at that time Dwaraka contained the mansions of vast numbers of the Yadava tribe, and that many more lived there more humbly, but blissfully.

"One of the Yadavas living in Dwaraka was named Ugra ('horrible, terrible'), who had two sons named Satrajit and Prasenajit.

Satrajit spent his days and nights performing penance for the Sun on the seashore. Eventually the Sun became pleased with his worship,and appeared before him.

"Seeing the resplendent Sun god approaching him, Satrajit began to praise him: 'O Surya Narayana! Be pleased with me! And protect me with your gaze of grace!'

"The Sun said, 'O Satrajit! I am pleased with your penance. If you have any desire then ask for it; I shall grant any boon you name.'

"Satrajit said, 'O Lord Sun! I am a poor man. If you are pleased with me, then give me riches.'

"The Sun took the Syamantaka gem from around his neck and, giving it to Satrajit, said: 'Every day this gem will give you eight wagon loads of gold. You must always bathe and do your daily worship before you wear it, though, because whoever wears this gem when he is impure will be destroyed.' The personified Sun then disappeared.

"Satrajit thereupon wore the gem around his own neck and entered Dwaraka. As he passed through the city gates the jewel's dazzling luster and beauty convinced the residents of Dwaraka that the Sun god himself had arrived to meet Shri Krishna. Then they recognized Satrajit and realized that the brilliance radiated from the gem around his neck.

"Then I entered into Shri Krishna's house — both His astrological house and His material home — and as soon as His Seven-and-a-Half began, the desire to possess the Syamantaka gem arose in His mind. Shri Krishna then called Satrajit to His court and said to him, 'It is very risky for you to keep this precious stone with you, because when people learn that it provides you gold daily they may try to steal it. Why not leave it here with me instead? I will take care of it, and you can come and collect the gold from it every day as usual.'

"Satrajit began to suspect that Shri Krishna wanted to steal the gem for Himself, not keep it safely as He had promised. So he told Him, 'My brother Prasenajit has already asked me for this jewel, and I am sure that he can take proper care of it.'

"'So be it,' replied Shri Krishna.

"After leaving Krishna's palace Satrajit went directly to Prasenajit and told him, 'Purify yourself, and wear this around your neck.' Prasenajit then began to wear the gem.

"One day not long afterwards Prasenajit went to the forest to hunt, and while he was in an impure state a lion caught him, killed him, and carried away the Syamantaka. Jambavan the bear, attracted by the gem's glow, tracked down that lion, killed him, and carried the gem back home with him.

"When the rest of Prasenajit's party returned to Dwaraka and could not tell Satrajit what had happened to his brother, the suspicious Satrajit jumped to the conclusion that Shri Krishna, greedy to possess the gem, had caused his brother to be waylaid and murdered. He voiced this suspicion to a few friends, and soon Dwaraka was abuzz with the rumor that it was He who had done Prasenajit to death and taken the Syamantaka for Himself. Mothers even warned their children to steer clear of their thievish king, lest they too suffer Prasenajit's fate.

"When Shri Krishna returned from abroad and entered Dwaraka, He found all the children fleeing in terror before Him, shouting, 'Run from Krishna the thug, who kills even children to grab their ornaments!' Though this was a rude awakening, Shri Krishna divined the entire situation in an instant. Then, in order to clear His good name of this false allegation, Shri Krishna gathered a group of men together and went to the forest to search for Prasenajit. They found both him and his horse lying dead, and by following the lion's spoor they reached his body. Giant footprints led from the dead lion to the mouth of an enormous cave, which happened to be the bear's den. After instructing His followers to wait outside for His return, Shri Krishna entered the cave.

"The cave was hundreds of miles deep, and Shri Krishna's own refulgence lit His way as He strode forward through it, marvelling all the while at the beautiful paintings inspired by the *Ramayana* that graced its walls. Soon He came across a great hall, outside of which Jambavan's son lay in a cradle, playing with the gem. Jambavan's beautiful young daughter Jambavati was rocking her brother in the cradle and singing, 'The lion killed Prasena, and Jambavan killed the lion; O brother! don't cry, the Syamantaka jewel is yours.'

"Sri Krishna marvelled at the sweet-voiced girl and her lullaby; and then that shining girl who had felt His presence in the dark of the cavern said to Him, without being able to see Him, 'Leave here before my father awakes, or he will kill you.'

"Shri Krishna smiled at her warning and blew a loud blast on His conch. It was because of my influence that He had to experience such trouble. Hearing that note, Jambavan woke and rushed out, and between the two of them a terrifying battle ensued.

"The residents of Dwaraka who had accompanied Shri Krishna waited patiently for seven days outside the cave. Then they departed sadly for home, saying, 'Someone must have killed Shri Krishna in that cave, otherwise why has He not emerged yet?'

"That epic battle in the cave continued for a full twenty-eight days, until both combatants felt that they had had their fill of it. Then Shri Krishna displayed His true form, as Lord Vishnu, to Jambavan. Jambavan, realizing that there was no difference between Krishna and Ramachandra, and remembering his promise of aid made ages ago to Lord Ramachandra, spoke: 'I am very pleased with Your strength, O Lord! After that lion had killed Prasenajit it seemed appropriate to me to kill the lion in return and take the jewel. Now I offer it, and also my daughter, to You; please do accept them.' Shri Krishna accepted the gem and took Jambavati as His wife; then He left with them for Dwaraka, where the townspeople, who had been praying for His safe return, were mightily relieved and greeted Him joyfully.

When Shri Krishna met Satrajit He returned the Syamantaka to him, recounting the entire story in detail. Satrajit fell at His feet, begging His pardon for ever doubting Him, and then gave his daughter Satyabhama to Shri Krishna for His wife. Satrajit also tried to entrust the jewel to Him. Shri Krishna gladly accepted Satyabhama, but requested Satrajit to keep the gem.

"Everyone in Dwaraka was ashamed to have believed the rumor about Shri Krishna, but He forgave them. He must have then thought that this chapter in His life was now closed — but I was not through with Him yet! Satyabhama had originally been promised by Satrajit to a Yadava named Shatadhanva, and this Shatadhanva became embittered when she married Shri Krishna instead. When Shri Krishna went to mourn Arjuna and his brothers, who had supposedly died in the burning of the Palace of Lac, His kinsmen Akrura and Kritavarma hatched a plot while He was out of Dwaraka, and incited Shatadhanva to steal the gem. Shatadhanva accordingly killed Satrajit in cold blood and took the Syamantaka for himself.

"When Shri Krishna came to know of this, Shatadhanva deposited the jewel with Akrura and fled town to try to save himself. But when they returned to Dwaraka, Shri Krishna and his brother Balarama hunted down Shatadhanva like a beast of prey and slew him. Now it was Akrura's turn to take fright and flee. To salvage His reputation yet again, for the rumor was bruited about the city that He had plotted the burglary and murder with His relatives, Shri Krishna called Akrura back,and induced him to show the gem to everyone. Then He reassured the terrified Akrura and allowed him to keep the jewel.

"When finally He became free of my gaze, Shri Krishna was so immensely relieved that He joined His hands together prayerfully and said to me, 'O Lord Saturn! Your mastery is miraculous. You torment everyone, even the devas and the asuras. Everyone gets misery, more of it or less, as they deserve. You are profoundly astounding.'

"This is the way I aggravated even Shri Krishna; if I did not spare Him, who will I spare?" said Saturn in conclusion.

Then King Vikramaditya rose to his feet and prostrated at full length to Lord Saturn, saying, "O Supreme Lord Saturn! Glory to you! You have purified me. Now I seek this boon from you, that you will torment no living being."

Lord Saturn replied, "O King Vikrama! It is because you are always intent on the welfare of others that you request from me the boon of removing the liabilities of others. I am really at a loss to find comparable benevolence in anyone else."

The pleased Saturn then offered King Vikrama this boon: "I will not torment anyone who listens to or meditates on this

Mahatmya of mine. I will protect day and night anyone who hears or concentrates on this Mahatmya and, installing this book in his house, worships it. If you cannot read or listen to this Mahatmya daily, at least do so on Saturdays, fasting on that day and worshipping intently. Do this particularly on the Saturdays of the lunar month of Shravana. O King Vikramaditya! Your mind has been purified; it is now free of filth. I shall explain to you how to worship me. Pay close attention!" Saturn then explained how to worship him with the hymn known as the Dasharathokta Shani Stotra. King Vikrama was immensely gratified to receive this hymn directly from Saturn's mouth.

Saturn then said, "Your Seven-and-a-Half is now completely over, and your rise will now occur."

Vikramaditya prostrated to Saturn, and, taking that planet's blessing for long life and prosperity, he said, "Great Lord Saturn! Just as you have showered your grace on me, even so shower it on every being!"

"Let it be so!" said Saturn as he became invisible, leaving Vikramaditya a wiser and much more sober man.

Chapter Sixteen

King Vikrama Reveals his Identity

Amazement overwhelmed the princess the next morning when she saw on King Vikrama the limbs he had lost seven and a half years before. Seeing her stunned, Vikrama disclosed to her his identity and told her the whole story, hearing which she became exceedingly delighted. She then told the whole story to her companions, who hurried to tell the king and queen.

King Chandrasena meanwhile had arisen from his bed after the vivid dream which had wakened him, and rushing to his daughter's palace he saw King Vikrama, as gorgeous as the god of love himself, sitting there. When King Chandrasena asked, "Who are you?" Vikramaditya replied, "I am that thief who stole the merchant's necklace."

Chandrasena said, "So I see. But your feet and hands were chopped off at my order, and I see that you now have both your feet and your hands back again. Please explain this mystery to me, that my confusion may be dispelled and my doubt disappear."

"I am called The Heroic Vikramaditya," began King Vikrama, "and I am king of the city of Ujjayini." He thereupon related the entire story of his Seven-and-a-Half to King Chandrasena, who fell at his feet begging forgiveness for himself for having so cruelly mistreated such a great king. But Vikramaditya told him, "The only offense that has been commited here is the offense commited to my destiny. The planet Saturn's impatience possessed my body for a full seven and a half years, and it was because I had insulted Saturn that I was in such a sorry plight. What did you have to do with any of that? You acted only to fulfill the destiny that Saturn had mapped out for me."

Then King Chandrasena offered his daughter's hand in marriage to Vikramaditya and sent for the merchant who had accused that hero of stealing the necklace. Hearing the summons, the merchant came to the court posthaste and asked King Chandrasena, "What is your command, your majesty?"

King Chandrasena asked, "Have you recovered your necklace?"

The merchant replied, "Yes, great King! A painted swan had swallowed it, and when later the swan brought it back up I was wonderstruck."

King Chandrasena said, "O merchant! All this was an illusion created by Lord Saturn. Taken in by by this illusion, you accused of stealing it the stranger who was your guest. Your guest has now arrived here. Do you recognize him? He is Ujjayini's valorous King Vikramaditya, who had been brought to that pass due to Saturn's ire."

The merchant's eyes became round like saucers when he saw

King Vikrama there in the palace, whole again. Falling prostrate and clasping Vikramaditya's feet piteously, he babbled requests for mercy for having laid a false charge of theft, and requested any punishment in return. But King Vikrama told him, "O merchant! This was not your fault. Lord Saturn, who was angry with me, caused all these events to occur." On hearing this, the merchant offered King Vikrama his own daughter's hand in marriage with an immense mound of gold coins as dowry.

Now the king sent his messenger to call the oil merchant, who came hastily to the court and, folding his hands respectfully, asked, "O King! What is your command?"

King Chandrasena said to him, "Do you recognize who is sitting here?"

Now, Vikramaditya's body shone dazzlingly like the Sun, and his luster was so incomparable that the oil trader could not properly recognize him. Then the king said, "This is the man who drove the oxen at the oil press in your home. Now do you recognize him?"

The oilman said, "He resembles him strongly in the face, but how can I be sure?"

King Chandrasena now told the oil presser the whole truth and said, "This is the Heroic Vikramaditya. In consideration for your attentive hospitality to him, I award one village to you and your descendants." Hearing this, the oilman was mightily pleased.

Chapter Seventeen

King Vikrama Returns to Ujjayini

Then Vikramaditya himself gifted a village to the pleased oil trader's daughter-in-law, and he celebrated his marriage to the princess and to the merchant's daughter with appropriate pomp and grandeur. There followed a full month of feasting and enjoyment, after which he and his wives departed for Ujjayini, accompanied by numbers of servants, horses, elephants, and chariots. All these accompanied him into his city with music and rejoicing, and the entire procession was escorted through the streets by all the people of Ujjayini, who streamed out of the capital in order to welcome their king on his arrival. The next day everyone in Ujjayini celebrated the whole day through, while King Vikrama's heralds made this announcement in the king's name in all parts of the city: "Lord Saturn is the greatest of all the planets. Let no one suffer as I did for belittling him." Then, on an auspicious day, King Vikrama ordered the erection of a temple to Lord Saturn, and the populace began to diligently perform Saturn's worship.

Anyone who reads or hears this story with full concentration and heartfelt devotion will obtain relief from all miseries.

PASCHATKARMA

DEITIES, SEIZERS & REMEDIES

Darshana and Deities

"The Greatness of Saturn" is a tool which can help you help yourself through your times of trouble. If you have total faith in the story's ability to help you, you need not know anything about it or its background. If your faith is not total, a careful read of the following pages may assist your faith to develop. The remainder of this book provides some mythic and cultural background for "The Greatness of Saturn" which can encourage its image to solidify within your consciousness, for sometimes it is easier to see an image when its background is distinct.

What you see in your mind's eye is your reality. If you fill your mind with soap operas, they will be your reality, and if you see God there, He, She or It will be your reality. Thomas Moore terms "fantasy" the human faculty which creates our individual life narratives from the objective data which make up our worlds. He explains:

> Fantasy consists of the images and stories we have within us as we go

> about our daily affairs. For example, a teacher in a classroom may have the fantasy of being a father to the young people in front of him. Or, as sometimes appears to be the case, the teacher may enjoy the fantasy that he is a little dictator, or an orator, or an actor. The fantasy is the image, conscious or unconscious, lying beneath the behavior or permeating the action; and it is the fantasy that truly tells the expectations one has or explains the satisfactions or frustrations one feels in the performance of an action. Perceiving the fantasies at work in our lives we can draw closer to the depth and to the soul-dimension. (Moore, p. 43)

We humans think in images and live in images, and to be healthy we each need a healthy self-image, generated by 'fantasy.' But a healthy self-image alone is not sufficient to effect harmony both within the individual and between the individual and the world outside. To be truly healthy an individual also requires a healthy "affect image" of the Universal Reality with which to relate, because each of us *is* an image of the Universal Reality. The Law of the Microcosm and Macrocosm teaches that everything that exists in the vast external universe, the macrocosm, also appears in the microcosm, the internal cosmos of the human body. Though the universe is eternal and without beginning, it periodically projects outward from singularity into multiplicity, remains multiple until its trajectory is spent, and then resolves again into unmanifestation. A human being is a living replica of the universe, and every part of the universe is as alive as every human cell. The parts need the whole, and the whole needs its parts. All the many individual microcosms, human and other, who tenant the great and singular macrocosm as temporary realities must establish and preserve a harmonious relationship with the One Ultimate Reality in order to enjoy a long and satisfying life.

For thousands of years India's Seers, the rishis, have sculpted their perceptions of Reality into images. The rishis teach that though there is but One Reality, this True God has Many Faces, each a personality of the Godhead. Though each Face is superficially independent, all are identical behind the persona. From the perspective of Universal Reality every Face of God is a limited expression of divinity, but from the point of view of that Multiplicity which is the Universe, each deity can be taken as Supreme in every sense. Differing systems of theology assign different roles to the various deities, but the ultimate sum of each system remains the same Absolute One-Without-A-Second. Each Face of God is a *deity*, a portion of God, and each plays an important role in the Great Cosmic Drama. Everywhere they looked, even on funeral pyres, the Seers found one of God's Faces, and in their magnanimity they envisioned such a multitude of divine personalities — some texts speak of 330 millions of deities — that everyone, of every mental disposition and temperament, would be able to find an appropriate image to visualize.

When we consider that the Sanskrit word *darshana* means both "philosophy" and "seeing," we see that, in India at least, seeing is believing, in a literal, not a metaphorical, sense. When you visit an Indian temple you go there for darshana, to look upon that particular Face of God, that wisdom enfolded into form, that it may enter your personal reality. There it will help to focus your concentration on the Divine Reality and will discourage your mind from either falling asleep or returning to its normal chatter. Images for darshana need not be material; to read with sincere devotion an astrological story like "The Greatness of Saturn" is to create within you images of the Faces of Reality that are the Nine Planets, whose darshana you then enjoy.

The "language of the eyes" which was so well developed in ancient India remains so important to Indian awareness that even in modern India all interpersonal communication of any value is partly spoken with the eyes. But since nowhere in the West is there any religious practice which resembles darshana, it is not surprising that most Westerners find it difficult to comprehend the practice and are bewildered by the way that Indians treat their gods like family members. Influenced perhaps by Semitic prohibitions against graven images, many spiritually-inclined Westerners seem prejudiced against loving the God-with-Form. Rejecting the projection of any sort of personality onto God, they believe devotion to a Face to be somehow inferior to worship of the Formless, and deny that the One True God can be viewed as a parent, or child, or lover of his or her devotee. Millions of 'progressive' modern Indians have also adopted this slant on Reality, including groups like the Rmakrishna Mission which have pushed Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's simple devotional intensity to his beloved Divine Mother into the shadows behind his disciple Vivekananda's more 'acceptable' concept of the form-free Absolute.

While it is true that "as you meditate, so you become," meditating on an image need not turn you into an idol, provided that you gaze beyond the face of the deity to the Reality that It represents. Each deity or god is an official position, like Magistrate, Commissioner, or Emperor; many are the gods who have come and gone over the tens of centuries since the first "humans" developed, and many still remain. The hundreds of millions of people who have continually nourished these gods with their worship and devotion have helped them to grow and develop. If we can appreciate these Faces for how well they play their roles, they can introduce us to their

Essence. So long as you remember that when you worship deities you are really worshipping the God Who is God in their clothes, you need never feel that you have descended into idolatry.

Perhaps that should be, "descended further into idolatry," for most of us are already unconscious idolators. We who "live and model our lives through acts of make-believe" have synthesized a world in which the living gods have been put to sleep, and only the gods of artifice and selfishness are strong and lively. We have replaced our images of God with images of our pop icons: musicians, athletes, and movie stars, punctuated by the odd scientist and aesthete. Our reality now reflects the nature of our gods, and we will never be able to get either ourselves or our society in order until we change our images and the conceptual reality which they create within us. How many people today are so spiritually advanced that they can effectively counteract the world's many powerful negative images, which lie in wait to corrupt us at every turn, simply by relying on their ability to invoke the abstraction of an image-free Reality? At least Indian tradition has never confused 'image' with 'idol,' as we seem to regularly do. Let us make what good use we can of living myths, which can at least partially convey to us that living wisdom which condenses into living deities. Isolated archetypes are not salvific; only living myths can heal, and myths live only when they are consumed whole.

The Grahas

Prominent among the many Faces of God stand the *Nine Grahas* of Jyotish. Though they are usually called "planets" in English, the Nine Grahas are much more than giant balls of matter. To comprehend what these Nine Planets mean to Jyotish, it is necessary to know something of the nature of the word that describes them. *Graha* ("seizer") comes from a Sanskrit root meaning "to grasp or catch hold of," and can mean both "sense organ" (which grasps sense objects) and "hand" (which physically grasps, grabs, grips, and gropes). When you can "get a grip," you can make good use of what life offers you, internally or externally; hence the use of the word *grahani* in Ayurveda to mean the small intestine, which is the organ that grasps the nutrients present in food from the outer world and conveys them within, into the circulation. Should the grahani cease its functions, the inner cosmos would lose its ability to seize physical sustenance, as the mind loses the ability to procure visual or auditory or tactile sustenance when the grahas that are the sense organs fail to perform. Those who release their grip on external reality similarly lose 'touch' with day-to-day life; whether inadvertently (like psychotics) or deliberately (like some solitary contemplatives) their mental "grahaness" degenerates, for better or for worse.

Just as you, the individual, can grasp the objects in your external environment, other varieties of graha can get a grip on the internal you. Indians have for centuries used ritual to evict from themselves and their surroundings all sorts of grahas, including *bhutas* (literally, "has-beens"; evil spirits, and the thought forms which act like them), before commencing any work in which they hoped for success. Though some grahas are internally-generated shades, like those fixed ideas which gain purchase on one's consciousness and refuse to let go, most are forces which originate outside the individual. A few grahas nourish us when they possess us; among these are anugraha (which literally means "to follow in grabbing") and vigraha. *Anugraha* signifies "grace," the grace of God which follows you until it grabs you and forces you to follow it into a state of holiness. A *vigraha* is an iconic image, a "form which enables the mind to grasp the nature of God." (Eck, p. 38) The Faces of God are all vigrahas.

Other grahas enter your reality as ethereal parasites. These grahas, like the worms, bacteria, and viruses which are our physical parasites, possess us to feed off us; they deplete and devour us whenever they temporarily gain control over us. Ayurveda devotes one of its eight limbs to the treatment of these astral bloodsuckers, and the Ayurvedic author Sushruta considers parasitical grahas in detail in the chapter of his treatise entitled "Prevention of the Non-Human." Among the myriads of potential possessors are the Bala Grahas, which can enter and affect susceptible children. Though the Bala Grahas are not the Planetary Grahas, they are some of the instruments through which the Nine Planets seize. Sushruta describes how they possess: "A Graha imperceptibly enters into the body of the patient in that same way as an image imperceptibly enters into (the surface of) a mirror, as heat or cold penetrates into the body of an organic being, as the rays of the sun are collected in the crystal lens known as the Suryakanta gem, and as soul enters the body unseen." (Sushruta, 60:15-16)

The Nine Grahas which are the Nine Planets of Jyotish are the Nine Chief Masks of Reality, the Nine Greatest of the Graspers, and from here on we will exclusively use the word "graha" to mean "one of the Nine Planets recognized by Jyotish." These Nine Grahas are a group of powerful astral forces which inhabit the corporeal planets in the same way that human personalities reside within physical bodies. The Nine Great Grahas are the nine major personalities which arise from the primordial images which populate the world of the mind, images which resemble the archetypes that Carl Jung described. Jung, who seemed to possess a healthy respect for the power of the archetypal world, believed that archetypal personalities "form a species of singular beings whom one would like to endow with ego-consciousness; indeed, they almost seem capable of it." (Jung, quoted in Moore, p. 216) In Jyotish we go a step farther and attribute to the Nine Grahas not only ego-consciousness, but the power to affect the ego-consciousness of other living beings.

While the fluctuations of the fortunes of the Nine Grahas as they speed through the sky are mirrored in the changes in the quality of our awareness, their physical forms provide probably the least important influence that these seizers shower upon us. Their most important influence is their ability to give us their darshana and to create images within us, whether we will it or not. Each of us, according to the individual astrological makeup mapped out in our horoscopes, is more susceptible to the darshana of a certain planet at a certain moment, and of the image that darshana creates within us, whether we are aware or not that that image has arisen. When we are strongly affected by that planet's darshana, when its image becomes solidly established within us, then even if we feel that we are choosing, acting, and experiencing out of our own free will, our choices, actions, and experiences will be colored by the qualities of the primordial entity that is the graha. The darshana that you have of a particular graha influences your own personal darshana, your personal philosophy, which is the way in which you 'see' the world. When Saturn strongly influences you, for example, you will experience Saturnian qualities like delay and pessimism as a major part of your subjective reality. If Venus influences you instead, appreciation for the arts and desire for other sensory enjoyments may come to the fore. As the graha, so the image; as the image, so the experience.

The images of the Nine Planets possess us so subtly that it sometimes appears that it is the grahas themselves which direct our deeds. Our internal graha images strongly induce us to experience the inevitable and often undesirable reactions to actions we have previously performed. Any action with which you identify yourself as the doer is a *karma*, and, just as surely as seed gives fruit after maturing into a plant, each karmic action will, as soon as it ripens, produce a karmic reaction. As these karmic seeds mature they project into the subtle or astral body, the home of your self-image, where they affect your mind by strengthening one or another of the qualities of the grahas whose images you carry. Your mind then directs your body to perform or avoid certain actions, which produce the beneficial or detrimental results demanded by the stored karmas. Your destiny is the sum of your past actions, and the Nine Planets see to it that you reap, without fail, what you sow, for they are the executive officers of the Law of Karma, which is the Law of Action and Reaction. Each graha acts on you according to his own unique job description, and the sum of the graha-vectors aimed at your awareness can sometimes cause highly original (and potentially adulterous, given the behavior of the planets during the Jupiter-Tara-Moon incident) deviations from the path you had planned to tread. By altering our perceptions, the images of the Nine Planets within us induce in us those peculiar thoughts which inspire those particular actions which our karmas require of us, actions we might not otherwise perform.

Though we like to believe that we make our own decisions, most of us are so thoroughly under the control of our past actions that when we act it is usually those past actions which act through us. Should you go out to shop on a day when Saturn's darshana is strongly influencing your mind, it is not the real 'you' who will shop but the image of Saturn within your consciousness who will shop through you. Or, since Venus promotes conciliation and Mars encourages confrontation, two people who are possessed by the images of these two planets will respond to a challenge in two very different ways. Even if you are aware of planetary influences, the shadow that a graha casts on your mind is nonetheless often strong enough to induce you to conform to its nature, and the more you conform to a graha image within you the less freely you yourself will be able to act.

Saturn

Saturn has been recognized as the most important of the Nine Grahas in other cultures as well as in India. The Chaldeans used Saturn for divination more than any other planet. Babylonian and Assyrian astrologers, for whom Saturn was Ninib, god of the south, also called him Shamash, the "sun-star," anointing him the 'sun' (most prominent planet) of the night. Since Saturn is by no means the sky's brightest planet, his 'solar' prominence lies more in his symbolic significance. Western alchemists called him the Black Sun. The Greeks knew Saturn as Kronos ("he who gives the measures" = the originator of time), Chronos ("time"), and Cronos (the crow god), the crow being much used in divination, and being symbolic of long life, in both Italy and Greece. Some even believe that the Holy Stone of the Kaaba in Mecca originally represented the god Hubal (Saturn).

Western psychological explanations of Saturn's importance concentrate on his distance from the rest of the solar system: "Being in Saturn, we have lost touch with the movements of the soul: the planets, lunar reality, and the surface of earth. We are far away within, in Saturn, the most remote of the planets, and the coldest. We have not lost something so much as we ourselves are lost at the rim of our inner zodiac, at the end of the world."(Moore, p. 169) In both Indian and Western astrology Saturn symbolizes people who are isolated from the daily life of the rest of the world: customs agents, jailors and jailbirds, ascetics, penitents on religious retreats, healers and patients in isolation wards or sanatoria, latrine cleaners, and grave diggers, to name but a few. Marsilio Ficino, the Renaissance philosopher, contributed this list: "We are subjected to Saturn through leisure, solitude, and sickness; through theology, secret philosophy, superstition, magic farming, and through mourning." (Quoted in Moore, p. 173) Anything that makes us withdraw, physically or mentally, from the thick of things is a function of Saturn.

Indian explanations of Saturn's preeminence center on his rulership of fate. The introduction to the Bombay Gujarati edition of

"The Greatness of Saturn" declares: "Saturn, who rules both longevity and prosperity, can make a king into a pauper, and vice versa. When Saturn is happy he causes good fortune to sweep through your life, and when angry he destroys everything. He controls everyone's destiny. No one can escape from Saturn's grasp, no matter where he might be in the world. No planet except Saturn can give you both long life and also plenty of things to consume during that life. Jyotish gives Saturn pride of place because only he can change someone's fate. So you should know what Saturn has laid out for you and arrange your life accordingly, if you want to live happily and peacefully."

As to how Saturn can "change someone's fate," consider these words of my mentor Vimalananda: "Saturn is the force of fate, the force that makes you experience your karmas whether you want to or not. In fact, he is the planet in charge of experience (*anubhava*). This is why they call Saturn the son of the Sun; the Sun refers to the soul, the true experiencer. How we relate to our surroundings is determined by every individual's innate nature (*svabhava*). Some people have an angry, irritable nature; others are naturally calm and complacent; still others are by nature fearful and timid. This 'nature' is inborn in each of us; it is present in our genes and chromosomes, and determines how we experience the world. In Sanskrit we say, *Svabhavo vijayati iti shauryam* — the true heroism is to conquer your own nature. Until you have completely conquered your innate nature, Saturn can still affect you. Saturn will search out the weaknesses in your personality and will expose them to full view, making you experience your limitations by making your ego self-identify with those limitations. As long as you are unable to control your own nature, you are at Saturn's mercy. If you can completely conquer what comes naturally to you, Saturn can have no effect on you. But it's not so easy to control your nature, and as long as it is not perfectly controlled you will always be subject to Saturn."

How strongly you are controlled by the images that are natural to your nature will determine how effectively you are ruled by your fate, which is the sum of the things in your life that you seem unable to prevent. In this context Saturn often represents the worst that your karmas have in store for you. While Jung opined that "that which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate," what frequently determines whether your fate is or is not unavoidable is whether or not it is *possible* to bring it into your consciousness. When Lord Saturn appeared to King Vikrama to return his limbs, he used examples to drive home his point that everyone, even God incarnate on Earth, has at least one blind spot that cannot be finessed and must be encountered. In these situations Saturn teaches endurance and humility. One Western author comments, "In esoteric teaching, Saturn is the planet of discipleship, and a disciple is simply someone who is learning." (Greene, p. 194) In the Indian context, however, a disciple is someone who learns by surrendering to Reality, who studies minute by minute everything that Saturn has to teach, be it bitter or sweet. True disciples attempt to control their own natures, that they may influence Saturn's influence on themselves.

The Seven-and-a-Half

One of the most important Saturnian influences on our lives is the *sade sati* (Hindi for Seven-and-a-Half). Though *sade sati* (in Gujarati, panoti) does not appear as such in the standard classical texts on Jyotish, it continues to influence the lives of millions of Indians even today. Your *sade sati* is the period of approximately seven and a half years during which Saturn moves through the three constellations of the zodiac which are closest to your Moon, viz. the constellation which holds the Moon, and the two constellations which flank it. For example, if your Moon occupies Libra, your Seven-and-a-Half will consist of those years during which Saturn wanders through the constellations Virgo, Libra and Scorpio. The Appendix explains how to determine when a Seven-and-a-Half will next overshadow your life.

Your Seven-and-a-Half begins and, as if he had flipped a switch, Saturn promptly begins to cramp your life as soon as he enters the constellation just before that in which your Moon sits. The Moon is the most significant planet in Jyotish in the sense that it is the planet of juiciness, of amrita. The Sun is the planet of light, true, but its light is so intense that it burns. Only the Moon's light cools and nourishes, and while a strong Moon in a horoscope will generally flood that life with an abundance of nectar, producing a happy, satisfying, 'juice-filled' existence, an afflicted Moon will afflict your ability to be satisfied. Saturn, the most astringent of the planets, dries up that lunar nectar, squeezes shut the doors to enjoyment, and pinches your prospects. "For the individual, internal work is . . . an attempt to build on archaic materials and to survive without life-giving moisture. The turn inward to melancholy is a move to a distant place within, to the cemetery of the soul. Cemeteries are usually located at the edge of cities, and that is where Saturn takes the soul." (Moore, pp. 168-9) This is one of the reasons why Saturn is the most feared and respected of the Nine Planets. Among the 'juices' of life is the sweetness we get from love, and one way in which Saturn desertifies our lives is to separate us from our loved ones, those who protect us from full exposure to the cold of the cruel world. Accordingly, people often lose their grandparents during the first Seven-and-a-Half of their lives (which cannot begin later than age twenty-three), lose their parents during the second period, and are then strangled themselves by Saturn during his third passage, if indeed they are fated to live that long.

The origins of this principle of interpretation are unclear, though the idea of seven years of bad luck surfaces in many cultures. The time span of the period also has a certain developmental significance, in that a child is mainly involved before age seven and one-half in fundamental physical development and obtaining primary skills; the permanent teeth arise and adult emotions begin to develop between ages seven and one-half and fifteen; puberty, a prime time for individuation and development of the thinking mind, occupies age fifteen to age twenty-two and one-half; and so on. Since Saturn moves once through the zodiac in about twenty-nine and one-half years, roughly four of these seven and one-half year periods occur during each Saturnian cycle. India recognizes the importance of the 'Saturn return,' when Saturn returns to where he sat on your date of birth, but experience has taught Indian astrologers that the *sade sati* is usually a gloomier experience than is the Saturn return. In those horoscopes in which Saturn is a positive influence, promising material prosperity or career advancement, the Saturn return is likely to enhance rather than detract from these indications. The *sade sati*, however, creates trouble for most everyone.

Remedies

Because your reality is greatly determined by how you perceive it, the "images on the mirror" created during your Seven-and-a-Half (or at any other time) which are allowed to accumulate in your consciousness will cause you to live in their reality until you remove them. Like the walls of a room, which throw such an effective shadow that no light from without can be seen through them, the planets 'throw' a sort of light which acts like shadow (Rahu and Ketu, the Nodes, who have no light, throw only shadow). Though the light of the Nine Grahas may confine your perception within prison-like walls, when you open a window your darkness will vanish, its insubstantiality betrayed. An astrological remedy (*upaya*) like "The Greatness of Saturn" opens a window into your being, through which shines enough light to 'wash out' the images your mirror has amassed. For example, a certain religious studies expert who has for many years been attempting to write an academic composition on Saturn complains that his work "keeps getting delayed," probably because he has successfully but unknowingly invoked the image of Saturn (who represents all forms of delay) strongly into his life. If he were to obtain, through upaya, Saturn's permission and assistance to proceed with his project, his path would be cleared and his delays eliminated.

Upayas, which are means through which an individual aligns and attunes himself or herself with the pure essence of the universal principles that are the Nine Planets, are living proof of the fact that India's traditional culture is not totally fatalistic. A horoscope is a map of an individual's karmas, drawn to the specifications of the Nine Seizers. Astrologers read this map to discover in which directions success in life will occur most effortlessly, and in which areas life will be filled with pitfalls due to impending reactions to previous actions. In many areas one's destiny can be remedied, and one of the most significant things that we can know from astrology is which aspects of fate are remediable, which are not, and for which it will be beneficial to attempt a remedy.

Many are the obstacles that the influence of the grahas can create, and many are the ways to eliminate these impediments. "The Greatness of Saturn" is an excellent example of one type of upaya. While "The Greatness of Saturn" will help anyone whose horoscope is afflicted by Saturn's "cruel gaze," it is a specific remedy for those suffering from the ill effects of a Seven-and-a-Half. "The Greatness of Saturn" can help you endure what you may have to experience during those years, and can help to minimize the misunderstandings that will occur in your life as a result of Saturn's shadow. But darshana of Saturn's image can afflict you and your nature even outside the precincts of a Seven-and-a-Half, sometimes even in a "Saturn return,"and "The Greatness of Saturn" can also help you help yourself alter the less productive aspects of "what comes naturally" to you.

The patterns created in the horoscope by the Nine Planets indicate the form and intensity of the images that will be created within the horoscope's owner, whether he or she is aware of them or not. Upaya's task is to manipulate these images, either by overwhelming them with healthier images, by strengthening our own self-images, or by creating a healthy relationship between the individual's self-image and the image of the graha. Psychological techniques which connect us with the archetypal world can act as upayas, but many other varieties of remedy exist which act at the level of the universal principles which frame the substructure of our intellectual and cultural environments. These principles, which lie deep beneath psychology, are particularly accessible through direct engagement with the Nine Grahas. A partial list of upayas (which are as innumerable as actions) includes the recitation of mantras (sacred words) or prayers, the wearing of specific gemstones or other objects, the consumption of particular foods or other elaborately prepared substances, the observance of fasts and other vows, specific acts of charity, and the worship of fire, the planets, or other deities. Listening to or reading planetary myths is also one method of placating the grahas, which is why hearing or reciting "The Greatness of Saturn" can be an upaya.

There is considerable disagreement as to the mechanism by which upaya delivers its goods. Some authorities feel that upaya-derived effects develop mainly through faith. When an athlete establishes for herself a training ritual which she follows with full faith in its efficacy, she lays the foundation for excellence in her sport. When she does excel she can, by future repetition of the ritual, induce peak performance through the conscious and unconscious associations she has accumulated during her performance of the ritual, reinforced by her belief in its effectiveness. Similarly, when an individual establishes an upaya ritual and follows it with full faith, fully believing in its effectiveness, his own self-image will be strongly reinforced. This strengthened self-image can then outshine any graha-derived images that may lurk within.

Others would have it that since every action has some effect which may or may not be readily traceable to its cause, it is the effect produced by the act of performing the upaya that causes its result, in the same way that the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon may create a typhoon in Taiwan. One example of how a distant and seemingly minor celestial cause can produce a major terrestrial effect is lightning, which appears to be triggered by cosmic rays. Lightning bolts are cascades of electrons; they zig and zag because the electron cascade is destroyed or peters out every 200 to 300 meters, and must be restarted by another cosmic ray. The implication is that "each lightning bolt you see is part of a release of energy generated somewhere across the galaxy, thousands of light years away." (*Discover* magazine, April 1993, p. 10) The "hidden causation" theory of upaya similarly holds that the act of performing a remedy (the cosmic ray) generates, by an unseen mechanism, an effect (the lightning bolt) which overwhelms or negates the graha image that sits within the upaya's performer. This is a sort of "biofeedback for the macrocosm," a type of prayer which can and does change things. In the words of Dr. Larry Dossey, who in his book *Healing Words* discusses what prayer can do and how it does it, "'Contagious magic' seems to be woven into the fabric of the universe!" (Dossey, p. 155)

Taken to the extreme, though, theories of the mechanisms of 'contagious magic' can themselves become mechanistic. India's Mimamsa philosophers, for example, are among those who go so far as to deny any need for faith in action. Mimamsa doctrine teaches that every properly performed Vedic ritual is bound to produce its desired effect, regardless of the performer's state of mind at performance time. But it seems a defective idea that ritual efficacy can be judged only by precision in physical action, for even if the degree of an act's efficacy usually does depend on how well it is physically performed, physical actions are still commonly controlled by mental actions. Where in such liturgical correctness is provision made for the effects of faith (or its lack), that psychic "action" which reaches and touches regions (and principles) that physical ritual cannot even approach? An upaya is well performed when its actions, by resonating cleanly on all levels of being, induce body, mind and spirit to turn in unison toward the desired goal.

One less "mechanical" way in which "contagious magic" operates is through the mechanism of blessings and curses. When you do something that you enjoy doing which happens to support other beings in some way, those beings will (generally) "bless" you for having supported them. This, which forms part of the rationale for the performance of charitable acts, applies to all creation, for each of us is one link in the chain of creation. A purposeful "charitable donation" to a dog, or even to an ant, puts you into a chain of receipt which will eventually pay you dividends, both from the plant or animal that you benefit, and from Nature Herself, who loves people who are willing to act as her handmaidens. Conversely, torturing, injuring or killing living beings will (generally) induce them to curse you, which will put you into a much less desirable cascade of karmas, whose dividends will be less enjoyable. On a subtler, and potentially more far-reaching scale, appropriate offerings can enable you to please deities, be they major (like the planets themselves) or minor (tree, river, mountain, and other nature deities). The Findhorn Project is a good example of how even under challenging conditions a community that has the assistance of blessings from local spirits can prosper.

While each upaya probably contains elements of all these mechanisms in varying degrees, faith is perhaps the most important ingredient of every upaya. External ritual is only the tip of the upaya iceberg, and the mere performance of an upaya does not guarantee relief from all troubles. When the pundit came to King Vikrama to suggest remedies for the king's Seven-and-a-Half, King Vikrama replied that he would certainly try to do whatever he could to please Saturn but that he doubted that it would work. His doubt was, of course, the first symptom of possession by Saturn's image, for doubt is one of Saturn's most fundamental attributes. Those who possess as much faith as a mustard seed can and do move mountains, and have no need for more specific remedies. For the rest of us, faith in certain ritual actions will give better results than blind faith in any random action, particularly when we desire specific results, just as a mono-diet of fruit is more likely to produce weight loss than is a mono-diet of cheese, though both are restrictive diets.

This approach to astrological remedy, which blends faith with selective action, is a Tantric approach, and all the remedies listed in this chapter are, fundamentally, Tantric upayas. *Tantra* is a spiritual science which is "shaped by an integrated concern for doctine and practice." (Coburn, p. 125) Tantra, a religion of ritual which developed as one offshoot from India's Vedic roots, teaches that desire exists everywhere, even at the center of the universe. It was the desire of the One to experience Itself which was the impetus that led to the creation of the cosmos, and if we can learn how to appropriately channel and harness our own desires, we can use their energy to recreate our own lives. Whether you want to produce an effect in your own personal microcosm or in the macrocosm outside, you need a strong desire for your intended result if you expect it to manifest. The key to any successful Tantric practice, including upaya, is to combine repetition with intensity. For any remedy to work for you, you must crave your desired outcome as strongly as a drowning person gasps for air, and keep craving it thus until it comes to pass.

Choosing a Graha

All of us are being affected by all the grahas all the time, but some of us are more affected by certain of the grahas more of the time. Since the perfomance of an upaya requires the expenditure of time and effort, and since using the wrong remedy for a condition will, at the very least, waste that expenditure and may even prove detrimental, it is essential to select one of the Nine Planets on which to focus the upaya. One way in which to select a graha is to consult a *jyotishi*, a practitioner of Jyotish, who can tell you which planets to target at different times in your life. Unfortunately, jyotishis who are competent, sincere and sympathetic are currently few and far between, on any continent. While you could also attempt to examine your horoscope yourself, by studying a text on Jyotish such as *Light* *on Life: An Introduction to Indian Astrology* (by Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, Penguin Books, 1996), you will soon see that interpretive Jyotish is not easy to master.

Many sorts of external methods, including dice, cards, pendulums, numbers, and even the *I Ching* and the Tarot, can be used to divine which upaya to self-administer. If you are a seasonsed practitioner of one of these methods, please employ it here. If you are not, you are likely to find it difficult to muster up on demand the sacred attitude which is necessary for such processes to work. Without such an attitude these methods can be trivialized, which inevitably prevents them from working. Since a remedy that does not work will thwart the whole purpose of this endeavor, we have instead listed below some of the typical difficulties that the planets indicate. Interested readers can read these lists carefully and diagnose themselves therefrom, much as an individual self-diagnoses when using the Bach Flower Remedies. For example, since Mars indicates legal problems, conflicts, adversarial situations, difficulties with siblings, lack of courage, and so on, someone who is having a significant life problem that involves one of these issues would try to propitiate Mars:

SUN - skin diseases, eye troubles, difficulties with father, altercations with the authorities, excessive pride, egotism, self-centeredness, pomposity, ostentatiousness

MOON - swellings in the body, water retention, difficulties with mother, emotional upheavals, hyper-sensitivity and overreaction, difficulty getting in touch with feelings

MARS - ulcers and other conditions of excessive "heat" in the body, tendency to accidents, legal problems, conflicts, adversarial situations, difficulties with siblings, lack of courage, anger, irritability, haste, foolhardiness, impatience, inconstancy, inconsistency, lack of drive, an "all-or-nothing" attitude, obsession

MERCURY - nervous and mental disorders, lack of ability to communicate or to study, aloofness, amorality, over-intellectualization, difficulty in thought and communication

JUPITER - obesity, liver diseases, difficulties with children or teachers, difficulties in having children, overconfidence, overindulgence, extravagance, immorality, greed

VENUS - diseases of the sexual organs, marital problems, laziness, vanity, sentimentality, vice and sensual corruption, lack of taste and refinement

SATURN - pain (especially of bones, muscles, ligaments, joints), timidity, diffidence, anxiety, fear, bad dreams, poverty, instability, shame, delays, humiliation, inhibition, loneliness, isolation depression, mental or physical rigidity, stinginess, disappointment, resignation, melancholy, lack of trust, suspicion, doubt

RAHU - timidity, anxiety, hallucinations, confusion, escapism, neurosis, psychosis, deception, addiction, vagueness, illusion, delusion

KETU - tendency to accidents, anger, irritability, impatience, inconstancy, eccentricity, fanaticism, explosiveness, violence, unconventionality, amorality, iconoclasm, impulsiveness, emotional tensions

Another approach, particularly for those who have no current outstanding problems, would be to focus on the planet whose qualities they would like to enhance in their lives. For example, people who wanted to amplify their powers of judgment should concentrate on Jupiter, those who want to augment their artistic creativity should emphasize Venus, and those who need more discipline and responsibility should approach Saturn:

SUN - Nobility, individuality, generosity, grandeur, dignity, power, authority, leadership, creativity

MOON - Receptivity, sensitivity, imagination, good memory, sound habits and conditioning

MARS - Goal-directed energy, strength, courage, passion, action, competitive spirit, vim and vigor

MERCURY - Rationality, intelligence, wit, cleverness, skill, dexterity, verbal and mental ability, skill at study, shrewdness

JUPITER - Growth and expansion, humanitarian and spiritual outlook, wisdom, optimism, faith, geniality, generosity, joviality, humor, idealism, good powers of judgment

VENUS - Affection, friendliness, love, gentleness, sociability, harmony, balance, elegance, gracefulness, refined sensuality

SATURN - Authoritativeness, discipline, responsibility, conservatism, practicality, realism, durability, constancy, consistency

RAHU - Originality, individuality, independence, insight, ingenuity, inspiration, imagination

KETU - Universality, impressionability, idealism, intuition, compassion, spirituality, self-sacrifice, subtleness

If after reading these descriptions you are still uncertain which of the grahas to placate, or you are in doubt about which mythic path to puruse, select Saturn. In the words of my Jyotish guru, "The ultimate Tantric viewpoint in Indian astrology is to please Saturn, because all of Jyotish is Saturn." It is possible, through rigorous penance, to control the darshana of all eight of the other grahas, but the image of Saturn can only be propitiated, not controlled. While everyone, deva, asura or human, who has tried to control Saturn has come to grief, anyone who can propitiate Saturn will pass safely through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Whichever graha you may choose, always remember as you worship it that you are worshipping the One True God through the medium of that graha.

Choosing a Remedy

Almost any kind of intentional activity can be made into an upaya. Though the remedies suggested here, which are simple and relatively non-ethnocentric, are all rough methods, they can, when performed with strong intention, definitely produce positive results. We will not consider here the more complex and ritually sophisticated upayas, such as amulets, rings, lockets, or pendants, that require extensive knowledge of astrology, mantras, pronunciation, ritual behavior, and other esoteric forms of wisdom for their preparation. Nor will we consider gemstones, for it is quite insufficient to simply purchase a gemstone and begin to wear it if you hope it to act as an upaya for you. How well a stone will work depends first and foremost on how appropriate that type of stone is for your horoscope, how appropriate for you is a particular stone (for all stones differ in power and attributes), how well and in what way the stone was empowered, and at what astrological moments, appropriate or inappropriate, was the stone obtained, set, and first worn. Without empowerment few gemstones will give the sort of dramatically beneficial effects that the scriptures promise.

While gemstones can sometimes radically improve your life, they can also, if improperly used, radically disrupt it. In particular, those who wear large, flawless diamonds or sapphires must be very wary of potential personal devastation unless they are sure that those particular gems suit them. Also, since the flawless jewels of good color and supreme luster which are required for use as gem remedies must weigh at least three carats, such upayas can be extremely expensive. Even the substitute gems prescribed by Jyotish, which are substantially weaker than their precious counterparts, must also meet all the criteria of effectiveness that apply to more valuable gemstones. Since such upayas will be useful only if you can afford them, and if you can find one which agrees with you, it is often better to concentrate on other remedies which may be more labor-intensive than the wearing of a valuable gemstone but need not be any less effective.

The Gujarati edition of "The Greatness of Saturn" includes, among the reliable ways to please Saturn, the wearing of a ring or bangle made of iron or steel, especially that made from a horseshoe or horseshoe nail that has been collected at a time that is propitious for the purpose you wish to accomplish. You can also feed, and otherwise serve, a wholly black animal, especially a cow; worship a Shami tree (*Prosopis spicigera*); or give alms to the indigent on Saturdays. On Saturdays you should fast or eat one meal only; if you eat, the food should include *urud dal* (split *Phaseolus radiatus*, a legume sold in Indian grocery stores). Note that Saturday vows are also useful for Rahu and Ketu, the two of the Nine Grahas who do not own weekdays. Rahu and Ketu are closely related to Saturn because they are shadow planets, and Saturn's mother was Chaya, "the Shadow."

If you want to experiment with such Tantric upayas, please consult the table on pages 192 and 193:

Using Upayas

To use the table, select the appropriate weekday for the planet you have chosen, a process (especially fasting or donation), a thing to be eaten or donated, and a duration. One time-honored upaya is to give donations once a week, either once or for a certain number of weeks, to the living beings ruled by a particular planet on that planet's day of the week. Thus to appease Saturn's image and the psycho-emotional-spiritual factors that it activates, you could give your old clothes to a homeless person on a Saturday or give a laborer on a Saturday an iron implement that is useful to his trade. You could also feed crows on Saturdays for several Saturdays in a row. For the Sun you could offer coarse cloth to the underprivileged on a Sunday or feed wheat to deer on several Sundays. This sort of approach can be followed for any of the planets and can be extended to the practice of immersing the metals sacred to the planets in flowing water, or burying them in the earth on that planet's weekday. This type of donation gives back to nature that which nature has given us and is useful as an act of non-attachment — particularly when you think of dropping real gold into a river to propitiate Jupiter! One remedy for the Sun could thus be to offer copper either to a powerful person or into flowing water on a Sunday.

To make a vow on a Sunday not to speak back to your superiors is to please the Sun by partially donating your pride. Since one powerful all-purpose upaya is to lovingly serve your parents, elders, saints, and holy places (like temples, churches, and mosques), you could serve your father each Sunday as an upaya for the Sun. If

INFORMATION FOR PLANETARY UPAYA

PLANET	WEEKDAY	PEOPLE	BIRDS	CREATURES
SUN	Sunday	Males, Father, Powerful people, King and Rulers, Physicians, Government officials	Goose	Tiger, Lion, Deer
MOON	Monday	Females, Mother, Agriculturalists, Horticulturalists, Care-givers (Nurses, Hoteliers, Food Providers, &c)	Partridge, Crane	Antelope, Hare, Water Creatures
MARS	Tuesday	Armed People (Police, Army, Security, &c), People who cut (Surgeons, Butchers), People who work with Heat and Metals (Engineers, Metallurgists), Foundry workers, Welders	Rooster, Vulture, Birds of Prey	Monkey, Jackal, Ram
MERCURY	Wednesday	Educated persons, Students, Accountants, Astrologers, Artisans	Parrot	Cat
JUPITER	Thursday	Wise and learned persons, Counsellors and Advisors, Clergy, Judges, Children	Swan, Pigeon	Horse, Elephant
VENUS	Friday	Performers (Artists, Actors, Musicians), Persons dealing in beauty, culture, and pleasure (Fashion designers, Decorators, Restauranteurs, &c)	Peacock Parrot	Cow, Buffalo (specifically the Water Buffalo, but Bison and Wild Buffalo also)
SATURN	Saturday	Old people, People who deal in old things and dead things, (Historians, Morticians, Leatherworkers, &c), People who deal with products from the earth (Miners, Drillers), Laborers, Renunciates, Monks, Isolated and 'odd' People (Vagrants, the Homeless, &c)	Crow, Vulture, Cuckoo	Elephant
RAHU	(Saturday)	(Same as for Saturn)	Gull	Snake, Camel, Ass, Wolf, Rodents, Mosquitos, Scorpions, and Other Poisonous or Annoying Insects
KETU	(Tuesday or Saturday)	(Same as for Saturn)	Owl	(Same as for Rahu)

FOODS	PLANTS	COLORS	CLOTH	METALS
Wheat	Huge Strong Trees, Red Flowers	Deep, Dark Red	Coarse or Thick	Copper
Rice	Oily or Sappy Trees, White Flowers	Milky White	New	Bronze
Red Lentils	Thorny Trees, Red Flowers	Bright Red	Variegated	Copper
Mung Beans	Fruitless Trees, Green Leaves	Green	Immaculate and Clean	Brass
Chickpeas (esp. the large black 'Bengal gram')	Fruit-bearing Trees, Yellow Flowers	Yellow	Average, and Ordinary	Gold
Beans	Blossoming Trees, White and Very Fragrant Flowers	Radiant White	Strong, Durable, Decorated	Silver
Sesame Seeds, Black Gram (*Phaseolus radiatus* = *masha* {Sanskrit}, *urud* {Hindi})	Useless or Ugly Trees, Violets	Black, Dark Blue	Old, Ragged, Torn	Iron
(Same as for Saturn)	(Same as for Saturn)		(Same as for Saturn)	Lead
(Same as for Mars)	(Same as for Mars)		(Same as for Mars)	Lead, Earth

you are an eager beaver, you can even go so far as to vow (on a Sunday) to serve your father daily for the rest of his life, and then begin this service on a Sunday. Likewise, in emergencies you can begin upayas on the appropriate weekday, and continue them consecutively for 3, 7, 11, 21, or 40+ days. For the Sun you would therefore begin on a Sunday and continue each following day (instead of once a week) until the vowed number of days is completed. In serious karmic situations, even longer rituals are called for and may become lifelong in cases in which the desired result may occur only in the next incarnation.

It is usually a good omen if the being to whom the offering is made sees the offerer, and the offering flows directly from the donor to the recipient without an intermediary. To appease Mercury by making an offering to students, therefore, it is more efficient to personally donate money to one or more students rather than to simply contribute to a scholarship fund. Also, donations should be desirable, not insulting or ridiculous. Do not create a scarecrow on a dead branch and attempt to donate it to a funeral parlor to try to please Saturn. Instead of giving a monk a dead or withered tree in order to appease Saturn, you could volunteer to clean out the deadwood at a monastery on a Saturday. Donations can also be made to plants and trees; you can, for example, plant and maintain a fruit tree to propitiate Jupiter.

Since sweet is in general the most life-enhancing of the tastes, many upayas involve donating sweet food to living beings. For example, for the Moon you can prepare rice pudding on a Monday and offer it to suitable people. The rules for donation can be quite specific, but in general it is advisable to make your offerings in the morning, especially if they are to be made to 'dumb' creatures, who are more likely to be in a receptive mood then. Note that some variants occur in the creatures or offerings listed in the table. For example, "cow" is listed above under Venus but is often used for Sun as well; the text *Lal Kitab* ("The Red Book") advises one to offer wheat or jaggery (the crude form of sugar available in Indian grocery stores under the name *gud*) to a cow on Sundays to remedy afflictions of the Sun. Or note that crows are mentioned both for Saturn and Rahu. You can feed *roti* (wheat chappatis or tortillas) with mustard oil and salt to crows on Saturday to make Saturn happy, and sugared roti fried in ghee to crows on Saturdays for Rahu. Each case must be judged on its merits.

Another old tradition says, "Fast on the day of the planet that rules the desired effect or indicates the obstruction." Since the point of a fast (and of all other upayas) is to make things better, not worse, in your life, you should select a fast according to your capacity and circumstances. The best fast is to abstain from everything, including water, but if your physical condition will not permit this, do not try it. Next best is to live on water only, and the next on fruit only. Thereafter we enter the realm of mono-diets; some of these are inclusive (e.g., milk only), while others are exclusive (e.g., no salt). Another type of fast is to give up a certain food for a certain period of time — e.g., giving up eating wheat for some number of weeks or months for the Sun. The nature of the situation to be remedied will tend to control the formulation of the vow.

Fasts and donations are often performed for the number of days or weeks equal to the person's age. A 39-year-old who fasts on a Tuesday will therefore need to fast for 40 Tuesdays (he has completed 39 years and is living in his 40th year) to have a significant effect on the image of Mars which lives within him. This linkage of activity with age seems to address the difficulty we have in supplanting habits of long duration. Setting up such a program also helps to infuse the ritual with life. The chief rule here is that if the string of consecutive days/weeks is broken, you have to start again (and they will tend to get broken — this is the beauty of karma!) To be a lifelong student, you might fast on Wednesdays for the rest of your life; to pass the final year of your university education, you could fast on the number of Wednesdays that equals your age; and to pass an interim exam, you would fast on each Wednesday that remains before the exam.

Sometimes, when feasible, it is useful to commence your upaya during the astrological season appropriate to the planet it targets. According to classical Jyotish these are: March 20 to May 19 for Venus, May 20 to July 19 for Sun and Mars, July 20 to September 19 for Moon, September 20 to November 19 for Mercury, November 20 to January 19 for Jupiter, and January 20 to March 19 for Saturn. And, because each of the directions of space possesses qualities, north and east are auspicious directions to face, if you have a choice and if direction is a consideration when performing your upaya. With regard to menstruation, which is a time of purification, upayas involving visiting temples should be temporarily interrupted for the duration of the flow. If you are repeating a mantra intended to invoke a specific deity for a specific purpose, it is best not to repeat the mantra while you bleed but simply to pray to the ḍeity during that time, maintaining the continuity of your ceremony by burning incense, etc. Repetition of generic mantras (like Mula Mantras) can be continued.

Some upayas can be undertaken on behalf of others who are incapable of acting on their own behalf. In such circumstances the intention of doing it for the other person must be clearly kept in mind, so that the results accrue to the right person. In general, however, upayas must be personally performed by the individual who desires the result and must be done with honesty and exactitude. Only when you have a tremendous desire will you be able to change your destiny. For this reason it is generally a waste of time and money to contract with anyone, in India or elsewhere, to have a third party who does not know you, and very likely could not care less about you, perform some ritual upaya for you.

In most cases, the goal behind the upaya, and the upaya itself when possible, should be done in secret to prevent other people from generating obstructive energies that might disturb the process. These obstructions may be overt actions that will impede the maintenance of the vow or covert psycho-emotional energies such as curiosity, ridicule, jealousy, and the like, all of which can fragment the performer's concentration. This is why it is usually good to be silent and not to speak to others while on the way to perform an upaya. Also, items used for upaya should be new or should have been acquired for the exclusive purpose of the upaya or should be personally meaningful in some way. All items should be acquired or created by you yourself and paid for out of your own pocket or purse. Select an upaya that speaks to you, that you feel strongly about, that you have confidence in, but remember that your chosen aim should not be one which will act to the detriment of any living being, or of nature in general. Though 'pleasing the planets' can be and often is used by unscrupulous people for unsavory ends, including death and destruction, upaya is meant to heal. Jyotish no more intends that upaya be used for injurious purposes than modern medicine intends that its painkillers be used to foment addictions or its life-saving drugs be used to kill. Always keep the intended outcome of your upaya firmly in your mind, especially at the time you perform its significant acts. Should you decide to immerse copper in flowing water on a Sunday for the Sun to obtain benefit from the government, you will need to focus on this outcome both at the time of purchasing the copper and at the time of submerging it. Only when you are mindful, not mindless, will the energy needed to accomplish your ends flow. You can make your upaya as complicated or as simple as you like, so long as you follow its rules strictly once you have established them. You can obtain further ideas for expanding your horizon of possible upaya combinations by consulting *Light on Life: An Introduction to Indian Astrology.*

Establishing a Direct Relationship with the Grahas

The simple, almost magical remedies for planetary appeasement that we have discussed thus far require faith in, but very little knowledge of, the Nine Planets in order to exert their effects. They work because that Supreme God Who is the Ultimate Reality is always ready to help living beings when they call sincerely for help. But the nearer you can get to God, the more efficiently God will be able to transmit assistance to you.The Nine Grahas are the nine rays of light (the seven colors of the rainbow plus infrared and ultraviolet) which emanate from the One Without a Second who is God. *Jataka Parijata,* a reknowned classical text on Jyotish, explains that the Sun is the essence of the soul of the universe, the Moon is the essence of the mind, Mars is the essence of strength, Mercury the essence of speech and wordly knowhow, Jupiter the essence of all knowledge and happiness, Venus the essence of desire, and Saturn the essence of misery. The flavor and energy that is the essence of a particular planet expresses itself through those substances, actions, and beings which resonate with it. We can scent Mars, for example, in such things as a crocodile's attack, a bolt of lightning, and a nettle's poison. The better a thing resonates with a planet's essence, the more closely it will function as that planet's representative on Earth.

In a sense a graha's essence expresses itself through its resonators in the same way that the energy of the life form that is a beehive expresses itself through each individual bee. But while an individual bee usually operates as an airborne extension of its hive's consciousness, most terrestrial representatives of the Nine Grahas do not reflect so perfectly the essence of their planetary parents. The nine rays, though pure when they emanate, recombine and interfere with each other as they spread throughout the universe, condensing according to precise astral laws into progressively more complex forms whose ability to speak to us deeply and incisively becomes progressively weaker. The further a thing is removed from the Source, the less its essence reflects that Source. Think for a moment of that party game in which one player whispers a sentence into the ear of the next. As the sentence passes from person to person it can become so distorted that its final version may have very little similarity with its original version. Now think of approaching a doctor for an appointment. If you don't know the doctor, you will have to proceed through the receptionist, who will connect you with a nurse, who will ask the doctor whether she is free to see you. Suppose she says that she is very sorry that she cannot see you currently, as she has no free time, and then suppose that this message is slightly garbled by both the nurse and the receptionist so that by the time it reaches you the message has become, "I won't ever see you, get lost!" It would be much more effective to establish a direct relationship with the doctor so that you could talk with her directly, in order to hear from her own mouth whatever it is she wants to communicate to you.

Now think of the one True God, who as the universe explodes into being divides into rays. Mars is one of God's rays, and as Mars shines down into the world its energy displays itself most strongly in those things which best resonate with it, such as red lentils, red cloth, the vulture, the ram, the jackal, thorny trees, and copper. Each of these items reflects the energy of Mars, but being complex the Martian energy they reflect is fragmented by interaction with the energies of the other planets. Thus red lentils reflect Martian energy, as they are red, but also reflect Lunar energy, since the Moon rules all food. As we move deeper into the thicket of diversity, the planetary energy of each manifestation becomes further tangled and so less useful as an upaya, for a good upaya faithfully reflects its planet's energy.

A better upaya will be to connect with the Martian energy directly, by opening yourself to Mars's ray through sincere homage to Mars. Worship of Mars will awaken the image of Mars within you so that you can then enter, via that image, into a direct relationship with Mars, and so with the One. The relationship thus created will be much more profound than one created through the use of an more material upaya, which is further removed from the ethereal, subjective reality that is the graha Mars. To use a medical analogy, ordinary upayas are like the ordinary remedies which cure disease; you take them when you are ill, and once you are cured you stopper their bottles and return them to the shelf. Veneration of the planets more closely resembles the physical and psychological disciplines which, coupled with the consumption of rejuvenating substances, actively make it more difficult for disease to return by enhancing your relationship with the universal principle of health. Worship of the Nine Grahas is one form of spiritual rejuvenation.

My Jyotish guru likes to say that upaya is an act of faith in two ways: faith is required to make the upaya work, but more importantly, you have to have faith that the upaya actually worked. There is no way to confirm whether or not it did anything at all, and you will never know what would have transpired had you not done the upaya. When, however, you establish a direct relationship with the graha, you can know, or at least you can sense, what is going on. In most cases what happens is that you establish a relationhip with the image of the graha within you; you bring this image into consciousness, so that it no longer needs to act on you as your fate. This conscious darshana of the graha's image is a confirmable reality — confirmable on the subjective level alone, perhaps, but confirmable nonetheless. One way to produce such a confirmable reality is regular, disciplined repetition of a *mantra.* Mantras, which are deities incarnate in verbal form, can therefore be excellent upayas. The *Arthashastra,* a classical Indian treatise on politics, offers this fine explanation of a mantra's utility: "A mantra accomplishes the apprehension of what is not or cannot be seen, imparts the strength of a definite conclusion to what is apprehended, removes doubt when two courses are possible, [and] leads to inference of a entire matter when only a part is seen." (Alper, p. 2)

Unfortunately, unless you recite a mantra with perfect intonation and use it within its appropriate tradition and ritual context, it either will not work or will give you wrong results. Moreover, for a mantra to give a really excellent outcome it must be given to you by someone who has already "perfected" it, so that you will obtain a direct introduction to the mantra's deity. My Jyotish guru compares a person who takes a mantra from a book to a child who randomly takes the phone number of the White House from a telephone directory. The child, who wants to talk to someone but does not really know to whom it wishes to speak, will get a busy signal every time it dials the number, because so many other people have the same number and are trying to get connected on the same line. No doubt this is a better situation than that experienced by the vast majority of people in the world, who don't even have the President's phone number or don't even want it, but if the child becomes frustrated it may slam down the receiver and storm off just at the moment it is about to get through. If the child can be patient and continue to dial, eventually the phone will ring, it will be put on hold, and at some time in the future it will get a chance to speak to the White House receptionist. Getting a mantra from a guru is similar to obtaining the President's private line; you can phone him directly at any time. He is still a busy man and cannot always come to the phone, but at least you can leave a message and have him get back to you.

Mantras are clearly superior remedies, but they are not always easy to obtain or perfect. Another method of gaining access to the pure rays of the grahas is via their myths, such as the myths which compose "The Greatness of Saturn." Those people who can enter into mythic reality become able to interact with the Nine Grahas in a way that is more elegant, simpler, and closer to the Primordial than is the sort of interaction that is common today, when many people bypass myth altogether and visit astrologers solely to obtain the charm or gemstone that they presume will solve their problems. But myth becomes an effective upaya only if you can tap into the deep knowledge that lives within it; otherwise it is no more useful to you than is a mantra extracted from a book. It is not always easy to recognize living wisdom, for the myths which we read today are not those that the Seers sang. Myths get transformed by their tellers, and the germ of the Vedic lore that remains in these derived tales lies buried beneath centuries of fallen cultural leaves. Intellectual dialectic is useless as an extraction tool for living wisdom, for it does not dig deep enough. Deep knowledge is deep because there is no practical way to exhume it with the intellect or to express it in superficial terms. We will attempt to expose some of this deep knowledge to view by examining the ways in which Indian myths incarnate.

MYTHS

Deities have lived in our firmament ever since humans began to look up into the heavens. In fact, the One seems to have created the world in such a way that it reflects Its existence; as Mircea Eliade comments, "It could be said that the very structure of the cosmos keeps memory of the celestial supreme being alive." (Eliade, p. 129) At the time of the Big Bang which began the universe, the energies which projected outward coalesced into the nine rays of the primordial entities whom the planets represent, which then combined and recombined into aggregates whose complexity of structure and signification multiply exponentially. These aggregates perpetually associate, metamorphose, and dissociate until, at the time of the universal dissolution (*pralaya*), everything returns again to the One.

In their roles as primordial entities, the Nine Planets connect us to that cosmic space and time which form the framework upon which our systems of knowledge depend. Their structure is our structure (the word "cosmos" means "ordered whole" in Greek); they move us with their movements. Astrology, the "knowledge of the stars," is one way of aligning the microcosm into a healthy association with the macrocosm. Since everything that exists in the outer cosmos is also to be found within the individual human being, the denizens of the heavens dwell within as well as without. By means of *sadhana* (spiritual disciplines) yogis, shamans, and prophets locate these internal deities, awaken them, and bring them into right relationship with their external counterparts. The experts of old who pioneered these disciplines hid the results of their experiments within Sanskritic myth. Sanskrit, which is a "dead" language to modern linguists, is from the mythic point of view one of the few "living" languages, for it is one of those rare tongues in which the "knowers of Reality" can directly transmit the deep knowledge of living myth into texts which take on lives of their own.

The Seers of the Vedas, who relied more on intuitive precision than on mathematical precision in their observations of the sky, expressed what they "saw" of the Nine Planets in terms which are incomprehensible to anyone who approaches them without the internal keys to interpretation that were handed down from guru to disciple. Deprived of these keys, most modern researchers conclude that Jyotish has progressed from simplistic Vedic conceptions to better-structured classical speculations, and that because these later theories are more complex they must be more advanced. The view from within Jyotish suggests instead that profundity is a function of simplicity, and that real evolutionary advancement in Jyotish has occurred on those occasions when the multiplicity of manifested myths has found new ways, through a process of attribution inspired by the Jyotir Vidya, to coalesce around the Center. "Whereas for us [in the West], knowledge is something to be *discovered*, for the Indian knowledge is to be recovered." (J.A.B. vab Buitenen, quoted in Coburn, p. 17) India's genius continually shows its savants how to locate the One in the midst of the all.

Many modern humans assume, most annoyingly, that all early civilizations were peopled with primitive savages who, being so much less intellectually sophisticated than we of today, were awestruck into such terror by natural phenomena that they could only save their sanity by descending into superstitious mythmaking. When materialist scholars, people to whom the sacred is but superstition, discover a connection between a myth and a natural phenomenon, they consequently gravitate toward the presumption that the myth is powerless to do anything other than represent that phenomenon. Mircea Eliade observes "... that desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies." (Eliade, p. 13)

Though most of the current crop of thinkers who still distinguish between "primitive" and "advanced" societies are either axe-grinding materialist scientists or clerics masquerading as savants, few in the ranks of the serious researchers have yet realized that while the ancients lacked modern technological skills, they were in certain regards (such as the ability to commit vast quantities of information to memory) far more proficient than the modern human. They knew what we have forgotten: that the Universal Reality can at best be experienced, not intellectually known; that ordinary logic is not useful to achieve such an experience; and that narrative can help humans grasp a hint, or flavor, or glimpse of It. The most sophisticated of these "primitive" seers employed their now-lost capabilities to develop mythic systems to efficiently store the products of their explorations. While such myths may have sprung from phenomena, the wondrously fertile ground into which they were sowed stimulated them to quickly branch into multi-dimensional images of Truth.

Even those savants who are sympathetic to spirituality find it difficult to believe that ancient myth could be meaningful at more than a single level. Some scholars maintain that all myth is essentially cosmological, and that the only gods are the stars and the planets. Others contend that myths mostly convey the social and cultural knowledge that is needed to frame a community. Some see agriculture behind every myth, and Carl Jung claimed that all myth is simply projection of an archetype (a basic mythic form which is common to everyone) into human consciousness at a certain time, place and environment. All these interpretations are but partially correct, for God and his assistants appear on every level of human reality, in different guises. Without knowing a myth's many contexts, you cannot know its complete significance.

When curious humans began to self-reflexively examine mythologies they were much impressed with all that pointed upwards, and as early as the eighteenth century some authors tried to show that all human gods are really stars in disguise. In the ninteenth century writers like Max Mueller looked to solar phenomena to explain many myths, and some today even read solar mythology into the story of Little Red Riding Hood. But even if these many attributions are accurate, they are incomplete expressions of the powerful presences which inspire myths. When humanity's deep-seated need to find meaning in its environment is projected out into the world, deities result. In India, at least, divine images have been reentering and reemerging from human consciousness for so long that a large majority of those which originated in the sky have long since been brought down to earth, and most of those which were born from the soil have found their way into the sky. While we focus in "The Greatness of Saturn" on the celestial manifestations of those godly beings, it is essential that we continue to keep sight of their terrestrial significations as well, both inside and outside the human body, if we hope to gain a glimpse of the multidimentional Reality that the seers of the Veda actually 'saw.' We must also try to import into ourselves a wee bit of the spirit of these seers by temporarily relinquishing today's mind-set and trying to gain access to their outlook.

Earth, Heaven, and the Underworld

Almost all scholarly interpreters of myth have in their enthusiasm to locate superficial correspondences overlooked the 'deep' knowledge which the rishis hid in code within. Some of this overlooking occurs because these thinkers are book people who, because they do not themselves practice any form of spiritual development, have no personal experience of deep knowledge. Other omissions result when researchers who work with ancient languages permit their intellectual preconceptions and prejudices, some implicit in and inspired by the structure of their own modern languages, to creep into their work. Yet another difficulty that besets such researchers is their insistence on awarding primacy to *literal history*, a literal interpretation of sacred texts, when the real history of living wisdom is *mythic history*, which requires to be read intuitively. Sadly, those who do espouse the primacy of intuition are often callow 'New Age' types, who reject the importance of text, meaning and history because they are so unaware of how little they know that they cannot entertain the possibility that they might be wrong. Too self-righteous to realize how deeply their spiritual materialism has seeped into their facile assumptions about ancient and alien realities, they are too ready to believe any foolishness that they "sense" through their rudimentary intuitive faculties.

Erroneous assumptions about what the ancients meant when they spoke of the sky and its denizens have thus proliferated, assisted unfortunately by certain Eastern writers who reason that if the Veda is infallible everything of value must be mentioned within it. These people, who subscribe to a different but no less deluded version of literal history, vainly strain to discover somewhere in the Vedic corpus evidence of every modern advancement. In its extreme form this school even identifies some of India's deities with alien spacemen. Both the materialist and the fundamentalist approaches, by mistaking wisdom's vessels for the wisdom itself, consign the original significations of the Vedic wisdom to history's dustbin, retaining only myth's hides for their trophies.

As an example of how far away from mythic reality literal history can stray, consider the literalist assumption that the 'underworld' must needs be underfoot. Though this may seem eminently reasonable and commonsensical to the average modern individual, suppose for a moment that the ancients had instead placed the underworld in some nether corner of the sky. Suppose that, instead of limiting 'Earth' to the solid globe that we 20th century materialists define it as, the archaic 'Earth' was everything that lay on the plane of the ecliptic (the orbital plane of the earth around the sun, which we on Earth perceive as the path of the Sun in the sky). This extension of Earth out into the sky would make an Earth that was truly flat. Like the physical Earth the continents of this 'Greater Earth' would still be surrounded by water, but the water would be a mighty ocean which stretched out into space to lap at the feet of the stars. Above this 'Earth' would be 'heaven,' and below it would be the 'underworld.' Those stars which disappear from view ('die') later reappear (are 'reborn,' or released from Hades). *

As soon as we accept these suppositions into our world-view, our frame of reference and our perspectives broaden infinitely. Suddenly the space we live in takes on the limitlessness of the space in which the sky-gods live, and our previous assumptions of what might be "real" get stood on their pointy little heads. Now when we think of the Great Flood, a myth which has appeared in ancient cultures all over the earth, it is the "waters" of the celestial "ocean" which come to mind, in which Noah's Ark now swims as a constellation. In the Indian version of this story the ark is a boat on which the Seven Rishis (better known to us as the Big Dipper, or Ursa Major), and the Vedic culture that they represent, are ferried to safety by a giant Fish (the constellation Pisces).

Gazing on myth from this angle we can find in the skies many of the cast of characters of "The Greatness of Saturn." Aditi
[* FOOTNOTE: A well-thought-out cosmology which catalogues such extensions of 'Earth' into 'Space' is presented by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend in *Hamlet's Mill*, and the interested reader will find a wealth of detail worth pondering in that book.]

('The Unbroken, Unbounded One'; by extension, eternity) is the mother of the *devas*, the 'shining celestials,' and Diti ('The Bound, Divided, Cut One') is the mother of the *asuras*, the enemies of the devas. There is good reason to believe that Aditi represents the northern celestial hemisphere and the zodiac, which being the part of the heavens that is visible throughout the year in North India would have remained 'unbrokenly' visible to sky-watchers there. Diti was then the visible portion of the southern hemisphere of the heavens, a portion which changes (is 'bound' or 'broken') day by day as the Earth shifts her position in space. Diti and Aditi are the two wives of the Rishi Kashyapa ('The Tortoise'), who is the tortoise-shaped firmament.

Aditi, whom we met in "The Greatness of Saturn" in the chapter on the Sun, is the 'mother' (the home, the womb) of all the deities (stars, constellations, and planets). Prominent among Aditi's children are the twelve solar deities known as the Twelve Adityas ('sons of Aditi'), each of which rules one month of the year (= one constellation of the zodiac). Each Aditya courses through the skies in his chariot drawn by seven green horses (the seven Vedic meters, which with the chariot represent all the Vedas and all there is to know, including infinite space). Aditi's most famous child was Vamana, the incarnation of Vishnu who took birth that he might beg the universe back from Bali, king of the asuras (who reside in the southern celestial hemisphere). While Bali may represent some particular southern star or constellation which once temporarily gained prominence in the sky, or may stand for some recurrent phenomenon, he most likely represented different 'things' on different occasions. Bali was guided by Venus, the guru of the asuras who, as we saw in "The Greatness of Saturn," possesses the Sanjivani Vidya, which can revive the dead.

Indeed, Venus is always dying (disappearing from view when it goes too close to the sun) and being reborn (reappearing after a predictable period of residence in the 'underworld').

Asuras are known to be stronger at night, which they rule, but each dawn the potential chaos that night represents is dispelled by the sun, who reappears to separate the earth from the sky and to measure the world by rising in the east, appearing overhead at noon, and setting in the west. These may be the three great strides that the dwarf Vamana uses in The Begging of the Universe incident from the "The Greatness of Saturn" to subdue Bali and return him to the celestial underworld. Or perhaps the three steps are measured at the vernal equinox, when Vamana's left foot reaches to the North (celestial) Pole, his right foot to the (unseen) South Pole, leaving his third step to fall on the head of Bali (in this version, Orion). Here Vamana would have arrived at Bali's sacrifice on the winter solstice, when the sun is a "dwarf" because he cannot stretch his feet (rays) all the way to the North Pole.

The three steps could also apply to the system of reckoning which takes one human year to equal one day and night of the devas. When during this period the Sun moves from the vernal equinox to the autumnal equinox (during which time it appears above the celestial equator in the sky), it is day for the devas and night for the asuras, and when the Sun moves from the autumnal equinox to the vernal equinox (during which time it appears below the celestial equator in the sky), it becomes night for the devas and day for the asuras. While the asuras rule during their day the devas are discomfited, but with the coming of the vernal equinox (sunrise on the day of the devas) the order of the universe is renewed through noon (the summer solstice) until sunset (the autumnal equinox), after which the asuras again get their chance to play about. Bali conquered heaven when the time was bad for the devas, who waited to reattack until the time became propitious for them. When the time was propitious for the devas, Bali advised his asuras to desist until time turned again in their favor. Though little solid evidence exists for any of these speculative interpretations of the story of Bali and Vamana, we can gain through them some of the mythic savor of the deva-asura struggle, a contest that is as eternal as the seasonal shifting of the stars in the sky.

Above all this celestial competition reside the Seven Rishis, and above them sits the Pole Star, who is known as Dhruva (The Firm, Fixed One). Chapter 22 of the *Brahmanda Purana* explains how, presided over by Dhruva and inspired by the celestial air known as the *Pravaha Vayu*, the sun takes up water and the moon showers it down in a torrential current which flows through celestial conduits called *nadis*. The sun provides heat to the world, and the moon provides coolness. It is no coincidence that this macrocosmic cycle is replicated within the human body, where the "sun" and "moon" are also *nadis*, ethereal vessels (much like the meridians of acupuncture) through which the life force known as *prana* (the Chinese *chi* or *qi*) flows to heat and cool the organism respectively. This prana is to the microcosm what the Pravaha Vayu is to the cosmos, and knowing how the one moves can give an astute observer knowledge of the movement of the other. The best astrologers literally feel the music of the spheres within their own bodies.

The Heavenly Mill

Dhruva is "fixed" because the heavens seem to eternally revolve around him: "The great circle of celestial luminaries are attached to Dhruva, the Pole Star, and go round and round him like a vigorous team of oxen yoked to an oil mill." (*Srimad Bhagavata* IV.12.38) De Santillana and von Dechend mention, in *Hamlet's Mill*, some of the many cultures that have seen a mill in the sky; among them, the Greeks called the revolving heavens a "corn-mill," and a divine mill named the Sampo plays a vital role in a Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*. The word *sampo* may be related to *skambha* (pillar, pole; see *Atharva Veda* 10.7), which signifies both the world axis and one's personal axis (the spine and spinal cord). Samson was tied to the corn-mill of Gaza, and in "The Greatness of Saturn" King Vikramaditya sits atop an oil mill for five long years.

According to the scenario presented in *Hamlet's Mill*, the celestial mill grinds on uneventfully, and there is calm in heaven so long as Dhruva remains firm. But now and again, the axle of the mill jumps out of its hole (= there is a change in the Pole Star — or perhaps in the Pole of the Ecliptic). Our Earth wobbles during its rotation, just as a spinning top which is beginning to slow down will wobble. Just as the vertex of the top describes a circle in space as it spins, as the vertex of Earth's axis of rotation slowly shifts its position relative to the fixed stars, it describes, over a period of approximately 25,920 years, a similar circle. This movement of the axis through space creates a succession of Pole Stars and causes the equinoctal points to change their position in space slightly each year, moving slowly through the zodiac in a direction opposite from the apparent direction of movement of the planets. This phenomenon is known as the Precession of the Equinox. As the equinox moves about one degree of arc each 72 years, it takes around 2160 years for the equinox to move through one of the zodiac's signs. The Age of Aquarius is the era during which the vernal equinox occurs in the constellation of Aquarius; the other ages are named for their own constellations.

As soon as the axle of the heavenly mill is fitted onto a new pivot, the mill begins to grind again. Atop the mill's axle, supervising its whirling, sits Saturn, the Oil Mill Lord who is the so-called "genie of the pivot." His grist comprises the multitudinous inhabitants of the universe, whom he grinds exceeding fine, reducing them "by Time to tales that others tell." Some call Saturn the "elder brother" of Yama, god of the dead; while mythically Saturn is the younger brother, in contemporary Indian idiom a person whom one must particularly respect for his power is often spoken of as "the elder brother of so-and-so." (The *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*, an ancient text, states that the asuras were the older brothers of the devas; there is no way to know whether this was the same idiom, but it easily could have been.) Whether or not you believe in the Ultimate Absolute — call It God, Nature, Gaia, or what you will — you have no alternative but to experience your good or evil fortune. It is the job of Saturn, who is Time, to ensure that everyone — humans, devas, and asuras alike — experiences those events that must be experienced.

After being possessed by the image of the graha who is Saturn, King Vikramaditya was literally put into Saturn's shoes: he took his own place at the top of an oil mill and slowly watched his life grinding away.

The oil of his purified consciousness, once extracted from the oil cake of his false pride, flowed out from him in all directions when he sang. (Some say Saturn is lord of music, because he rules the Air element, which transmits sound.) Music is another of the means used in India for emotional purification, for each raga when properly played creates a particular emotion within its performer and listeners. That the king could sing Raga Dipaka and ignite the lamps of the city suggests that he had been sufficiently purified that Raga Dipaka was also igniting the "lamps" within his own body. King Vikramaditya represents every human being whose consciousness sits atop the axle (spine and spinal cord) of the mill that is the body, a mill which grinds out an unending stream of the flour of the results of our actions. The astronomical and astrological realities of the myths we find in "The Greatness of Saturn" form only a portion of the totality of the deep wisdom that they contain, wisdom which extends particularly to the esoteric physiological significations of Tantra. We cannot look for the Nine Grahas only outside ourselves, for they are also within. If we are truly to comprehend myth that appears at all levels of our existence, we must carefully examine it from all its facets.

Evolution and Devolution

Life in the cosmos is a two-way highway on which simplicity ramifies into complexity in one lane and complexity resolves into simplicity in the other. During prehistory, when human society was relatively simple, astrological knowledge remained predominantly implicit and intuitional. As cultures urbanized and complexified, this knowledge stratified, becoming more explicit and more rule-based, attentive more to external detail than to internal unitary awareness. From the worldly point of view, this linear progress toward increased complexity is evolutionary change, but from the spiritual point of view, mundane complexity is devolutionary when it drags your awareness away from the Absolute, Who is by nature uncomplicated. Any move from simplicity toward intricacy, which moves in a direction away from the Center where sits the One is likely to fray the elegant, delicate fabric of the All-in-One, One-in-All Reality that the myth has woven.

When changes in a myth are inspired by the Jyotir Vidya, the result is *evolution*. Such evolution is the true sort of progress, for it reestablishes a clear and vital connection between the fragmented myth and the Source of its fragments, between the All and the One, and by doing so, it reestablishes the sacred in the midst of the mundane. When, however, modifications in myths are inspired by individual, social, or other limited human aspirations, *devolution* occurs. Devolution bends the myth further from the Center, fragmenting it further in the operation. While both these processes are continually at work, evolution tends to occur at occasional intervals (similar to the "punctured evolution" of modern biology), and devolution tends to be more constant and more insidious.

Let us take as an example of mythic evolution the account of the greatness of the Sun in "The Greatness of Saturn." In the original version of the story of how the Sun lost some of his luster, the Sun's wife was named Saranyu instead of Samjna, and the 'substitute wife' was called Samjna (which can mean 'the Image'). Saturn does not seem to appear in this version. Later Saranyu became Samjna, and

Samjna become Chaya, 'the Shadow,' who was Saturn's mother. The word *chaya* can indicate the sorts of dark, hidden, unconscious things we think of today when we think of the shadow, but it also indicates the skin's luster and the body's aura. *Chaya*, which can be light or dark, is an effect that is cast or thrown by an original object. The Sun's brilliant rays all reflect his image, as we can clearly see when we look at the sun's reflection in a still pool. From this standpoint, even a brilliant image can be a shadow.

Chaya is particularly important to materialists because its shadow permits us to believe that illusory things are real. From the viewpoint of the Sun (the soul), all material things are illusory because they cannot shine with their own light; but from the viewpoint of Rahu and Ketu, the Nodes, who are *chaya grahas* ("Shadow Planets"), the material world seems extremely solid and real. A *chaya graha* is a shadow that comes to believe itself to be alive. Eclipses, which are caused by Rahu and Ketu, are themselves 'alive'; they are shadows which presume themselves to be real. While sunshine allows us to see both things and the shadows of things clearly, shadows show us only illusion. The Nodes are reknowned in Jyotish for their ability to create falsity, sophistry, false ego, and acquisitiveness in those who are susceptible to their influence. When the guardians of myth fall under the influence of the Nodes, for example, devolution becomes inevitable. One important source of mythic devolution has been India's priestly caste, the Brahmanas, who are wardens for many a myth. Originally, *brahmam janati iti brahmanah*: a Brahmana was anyone who actually *knew* Reality, in the way that a seer could see Reality. When Bali refused to turn away the Divine Dwarf from his door because he was a Brahmana, he meant that he respected Vamana as a Knower of the

Absolute. Later, when caste came to be determined by birth, any offspring of a member of the caste of Brahmanas, be he ever so depraved, was automatically awarded the title 'Brahmana.' An unscrupulous minority of Brahmanas has conspired to profit from their elevated position in society by using the story of Vamana, and others like it, to justify demanding extravagant gifts from the devout. In some instances the priestly caste has also deliberately 'bent' sacred myth to make it appear to justify degraded ritual and social status for men of lower caste, and for women in general.

Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras

By and large, however, most 'Brahmanas by birth' have honestly and accurately preserved the living wisdom with which they have been entrusted, by pouring this old (*purana*) knowledge into the new conceptual bottles that are the groups of texts known as the *Tantras* and the *Puranas.* Though the composers of the Puranas and Tantras both aimed for continuity with the hidden current of living Vedic wisdom, their works sometimes display radically different approaches to the same mythic material, partly because of wide variance in how the material was interpreted. While they share many principles, including the doctrine of the Nine Planets, the Tantras focus on practice (as we saw in our discussion on upaya), and the Puranas concentrate on theory.

Ludo Rocher explains that the most salient feature of things described in India as *purana* is that they are simultaneously ancient and new; they have existed from time immemorial and have undergone repeated renewal and rejuvenation, like the human race itself. The traditional etymology of the word *purana* is *pura hi anati idam*, "this breathes from former times" (*Vayu Purana* 1.183). The Puranas re-presented packages of Vedic reality, re-contextualizing it to create new images that better fit the new reality of the world they then lived in. The Puranas themselves claim that the Vedas form a Purana, in that their knowledge is not fixed in time but is continually renewed, and that the Puranas form a Veda, in that they bear the message of the Vedas. The Vedas are the elder statesmen of the Puranic and Tantric systems, the senior dignitaries whose seal of approval authorizes the projects that their younger fellows produce.

After the Vedas became a closed cosmos, living myth in India began to take birth in the Puranic and Tantric universes, which long remained open to those freshly-conceived deities and concepts which maintained mythic continuity with Vedic revelation. The authors of the Puranas and the Tantras actively envisioned and attempted to establish this continuity, both to keep unbroken the chain of transmission of the living wisdom and to extend to the Puranas the sort of sanctity hitherto awarded only to the Vedas. Thus the Puranas, together with related works which include the great epic poems of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are sometimes called the 'Fifth Veda.' Indeed, the Rishi Veda Vyasa, who is said to have divided the once-unitarian Veda into four, is also the reputed author of the Puranas and the *Mahabharata*. One feature which separates this 'Fifth Veda' from its four kinsmen is that it is accessible to everyone. Whatever may have been the situation prevailing at the start of the Vedic religion, by its twilight the Vedas had become the private property of males from the highest castes. The Puranas however belong to all devout people of any sex from any caste.

Similarly, initiation into Tantric ritual was and is open to any sincere individual who is judged fit to perform its practices.

There have been two principal streams of Indian mythic transmission: the Sanskritic, literary, liturgical tradition of the priests, scribes, renunciates, and other members of the "official spiritual subculture," as manifested in works like the Puranas; and the aggregate of folk traditions, almost exclusively oral, which are propagated for local purposes in local languages. Both these streams have devolved away from the Center, bending toward the limited visions of their many reinventors, but both continue to contain within their mass some kernels of deep truth which continue to be bequeathed from one hearer to the next. Puranic mythology often sought to synthesize such autochthonic myth with Brahmanical wisdom. It was a simultaneous twofold movement: an "effort to broaden the appeal of the Aryan world view by enfolding into it various elements of popular origin" and an "effort to provide those elements with a new dignity in the form of verbal compositions in Sanskrit. One of the reasons for the complexity and encyclopedic quality of the Sanskrit Puranas is that they are the meeting ground for these two mutually reinforcing inclinations." (Coburn, p. 17) The Sanskrit language is particularly useful for the containment of integrated knowledge because of the many different levels of meaning that adorn each Sanskrit word.

The great evolutionary value of the Puranas lies in their aim to reconstitute a living mythic system at whose center The Absolute sits holding the reins. Though the Vedas address little directly to the *Purusha,* the One from which All arises, worship of the One through the Many was probably the central, though often unspoken, Vedic attitude. As access to the deep knowledge of the Vedas disappeared, worship of the many as the many continued to devolve until an evolutionary spurt herded these many back toward Oneness by installing them as the Many Faces of the One in the Puranas and the Tantras. While the practice by which wholly different mythic entities were cobbled together into unified mythic realities goes back at least to the days of the Vedic texts called *Brahmanas* (a group of texts which detailed to members of the caste of Brahmanas how and why to perform the rituals prescribed in the Vedic hymns), it was the Puranas which systematically united the multiplicity of the heavenly host into a single Paramount Lord. Worship of this Supreme Being Who alone requires worship, within Whom everything imaginable in all possible cosmoses exists, is equivalent to worship of all the deities, provided it is done with full faith in that being as the Supreme Personality of the One True God.

Supreme Personalities

The greatest among the Puranas is generally taken to be the *Srimad Bhagavata Maha Purana*, a text which addresses the many gods of the cosmos not for themselves alone but as foils to *Maha Vishnu* (the Great Preserver), the One God who controls them all. One of the *Srimad Bhagavata's* many representations of Vishnu is as *Jyotir Loka*, the Principle of Time and Space, Vishnu as embodiment of the celestial regions. While the upper half of Jyotir Loka is the image of Vishnu, the lower half is a Gangetic dolphin who swims in the River Ganga that is the Milky Way. The dolphin's segmented tail is composed of the various worlds strung together, circling around

Him like a halo. Some versions of this image in the *Srimad Bhagavata* have the Nine Planets hanging from His tail; others allocate those planets, and various stars, to various parts of His body.

One way devotees use this image is to make it a part of themselves by visualizing it regularly: "Every day at nightfall one should sit silently gazing at this form of Maha Vishnu, including in it all the divinities, and with great concentration pray: 'I meditate on the Supreme Person, who is the Master of all Divinities, who is of the form of the Wheel of Time, and who is the support of all the luminous constellations.' Whoever meditates on, and makes obeisance to, this divine form of the Lord constituted of all planets, stars and constellations uttering this prayer during the three 'joints' of the day [dawn, noon, and dusk] destroys the effects of all sins committed that day." (*Srimad Bhagavata* V.23.8-9) The text goes on to suggest that this visualization can also be used in conjunction with certain yogic procedures when you discard your body, to ensure that your spirit proceeds to the celestial regions.

Other Puranas created other synthetic images in honor of yet other deities. For example, when Shiva sought to destroy Daksha's sacrifice, the sacrifice embodied itself as a deer and fled to the heavens, but one-half of Shiva flew up to kill it and enveloped the sky as the *Kalarupi Hara* (roughly, 'The Killer in the Form of Time'). Aries was His head, Taurus His neck, and so on around the zodiac to Pisces, His feet. The shattered pieces of the deer's body became stars — e.g., its head became the Vedic constellation (*nakshatra*) Mrigashirsha, which is part of Orion. A different version of the legend of Mrigashirsha has Shiva shooting an arrow at the head of Brahma, the Creator, who had taken the form of a deer when attempting to flee from justice after he had tried to ravish his own daughter, the goddess Sarasvati.

Individual planets also appear identified with individual deities, a development that seems to have occurred at the point when the development of Jyotish intersected with the Tantric and Puranic push for systemization of the cosmos. One set of such correlations identifies each of the planets with one of the *avataras* (incarnations) of Vishnu. A list of ten of Vishnu's births on Earth became (relatively) standardized at roughly the same time that the number of planets became standardized at nine. *Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra*, India's most famous astrological text, associates the grahas with the avataras thus: Sun with Rama, Moon with Krishna, Mars with Narasimha (the Man-Lion), Mercury with Gautama Buddha, Jupiter with Vamana, Venus with Parashurama, Saturn with Kurma (the Tortoise), Rahu with Varaha (the Boar), and Ketu with Meena (the Fish). (*Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra* 2:5-7) Worship of Vishnu's Avataras is thus a convenient and engaging way to worship the Nine Grahas, and vice versa, and texts like Jayadeva's famous *Dashavatara Stotra* (Hymn to the Ten Avataras) are used accordingly.

Graha Identifications

Another approach to unification involved identifying each of the Nine Grahas with one of the extant members of the Vedic pantheon. One list nominates Agni, Varuna (the Lord of Water), Subrahmanya, Maha Vishnu, Indra, Shachi (Indra's consort), and Brahma as the presiding deities of the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn respectively. (*Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra* 3:18) The *Brahmanda Purana's* list is almost identical: Agni, Water, Skanda Kartikeya (another name for Subrahmanya), Narayana (another name for Maha Vishnu), Brihaspati, Shukra, and Yama. (*Brahmanda Purana* I.2.24.47ff)

One reason for the differences in planet-deity attribution (Indra vs. Brihaspati for Jupiter, Shachi vs. Shukra for Venus, and Brahma vs. Yama for Saturn) is the great difficulty involved in pinning down specific Vedic deities with specific planets. The same graha can have two very different meanings according to which aspect of reality it is meant to temporarily address. Saturn represents Yama when we think of Saturn as the outer limit, the end, of the visible universe; but he also represents Brahma when we think of Saturn in his role as containing all of creation. When a student once said to a respected contemporary Indian astrologer that another name for Saturn is Yama, in his capacity as the cause of death, the astrologer replied, "I am a devotee of Shiva, my boy, and to me personally Saturn is never *yama* (death), Saturn is always *shiva* (transformation)." But in a different context, when that same gentleman puts on his astrologer's hat and sits down to read someone's birth chart, he will definitely look to the position of that same Saturn to discover information about that individual's death.

Another difficulty in attempting to make permanent, one-to-one correspondences between Vedic and Puranic or Tantric deities is that identifications have been fluid throughout Indian history. They have been so fluid that the same Indra that represented a particular star or planet in one Vedic hymn could easily have represented, in another context, a different heavenly body — though it is almost impossible to prove that Indra ever represented any heavenly body. Consider the fact that, since they were born of the same father through two different mothers, the devas and the asuras are siblings. While in the Rig Veda (the oldest of the Vedas) the word asura meant "god," in ancient Iran ('Aryan') *Ahura* (asura) was the chief deity, and India's devas appeared as *daevas*, beings who became the 'devils' of Western civilization. Did a rebellion against older Indo-Iranian gods lead to India's consignment of the asuras to the underworld? Did changes in the asuras' status change their celestial sigifications? No one knows.

Likewise, the same feature of the celestial landscape may have a number of separate identifications. The Milky Way, for example, has been called, in various circumstances, "The Purifying Soma" (*Soma Pavamana*), "The Serpent of the Deep" (*Ahirbudhnya*), and the Cosmic Serpent on whose coils Vishnu sleeps (*Ananta* or Shesha). It has also been identified with the rivers Sarasvati, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Yamuna, Mahanadi, Devanadi, Viraja, and Rasa. The indeterminate nature of India's myth disturbs literalists who, driven by a mania for establishing the "original system," are always trying to permanently tie down mythic references to terrestrial locations and to determine the "real" identity of, say, the Vedic Soma. There were at least three Vedic Somas: Soma Pavamana (the Milky Way), Soma the moon, and the Soma plant that give the Soma juice (see Mukherji, p. 10). Even Soma the moon possessed three separate components: Soma the orb, Soma the deity overseeing the moon, and Soma the nectar derived from the moon. How easy, then, is it to know which Vedic reference refers to which of the Somas?

With the passage of time, the various Somas began to be conflated, as in the early text which states, "The moon is none other than King Soma, the food of the gods." (*Shatapatha Brahmana* 11.1.4.4) When the many Vedic Somas combined with other ancient identifications (including the identification of the Moon, the "gleaming drop in the sky," with semen) and other ancient mythic themes (like that of the theft of Soma), new myths developed. One composite myth in which the Moon stars under an assumed name appears in "The Greatness of Saturn" in the story of Rahu and Ketu: the Churning of the Cosmic Ocean. Though this myth, which has obvious parallels to the Vedic ritual in which the Soma juice was pressed from the Soma plant, does not appear as such until the epics, it may well have been around since the beginning of time in oral form alone. In some versions of the myth (especially *Mahabhbarata* 1.16.33), the Moon is even said to have emerged from the Ocean instead of from the Rishi Atri, who serves in "The Greatness of Saturn" as the Moon's source. Atri's paternity is apparently a later version of the tale. "The moral of all this is, again, that we should avoid any simplification and unjustified brevity in formulating what has happened. Very complicated problems have indeed been unduly and unjustly simplified by those who reduced them to the formula: 'The Vedic sacrificial beverage or draught of immortality has become a name of the moon in Hinduism.'" (Gonda, p. 70)

Jyotish sees little use in attempting to trace by any means other than mythic the development of the myths of the Nine Planets. The Moon in Jyotish is the descendant of the Vedic Moon, and like all descendants it is clearly different from its progenitors even as it possesses some of the same external characteristics. What is truly similar about the earlier and the later Moons is its mythic life force, which is only partially visible from without. We must locate this force where it is now, not to where it used to be, if we wish to collect it. We cannot know if, in Vedic times, Brihaspati always signified the planet Jupiter, or Ushanas always signified the planet Venus. All we can be sure of is that something of Brihaspati's life force has been inherited by Jupiter, and something of Ushanas's essence by Venus.

Sometimes the conflations are almost mathematical in their operation: When we add together one tale of Vishnu in the Rig Veda, in which he takes three paces, with a story from the Shatapatha Brahmana, in which he becomes a dwarf and the asuras give the gods as much land as he can lie down on, we obtain the story of Vamana. Or take the Twelve Adityas, who appear to represent an accumulation of various sun gods (Mitra as an Indo-European sun god, Pushan as the sun-god of a small shepherd tribe, and so on) that they were reborn in myth as the sons of the firmament to rule the twelve solar months. On other occasions, the process is not so neat and loose ends proliferate. While in "The Greatness of Saturn" Mars is said to have been born of from Shiva's perspiration, other sources say he sprang from a drop of Parvati's menstrual blood or from drops of Shiva's blood. The influence of fire is the constant, for both sweat and blood are examples of fire contained in water. But Mars' earliest parents seem to have been the Seven Sages and their wives, the Pleiades; in such circumstances the role of 'fire in water' is performed by the semen of Agni, the god who is fire personified,

Giorgio Bonazzoli has discovered several disparate Vedic fragments which eventually condensed into the tale of the Moon's abduction of Jupiter's wife (which is found in "The Greatness of Saturn" in the story of Mercury's birth). One fragment has Soma return to Brihaspati a Brahmana's wife that he had taken away; another mentions that the woman was a star (*taraka*), in particular a

vikeshi taraka ("hair-like star" = a comet); and a third states that the planet Mercury is Soma's son. Some or all of these elements may have been part of a story which may have referred to some myth well-known to the people of that time, or they may not; this is completely unclear. Some or all these elements may or may not have referred to cosmological events. Both the war for Tara and the tussle for the child were either added by the writers of the Puranas or were oral traditions which were appended when the story coalesced. The message that the Vedic version of this story conveyed may have been the same, similar, or substantially different from the message that the Puranic versions deliver; it is difficult or impossible to know even how astronomical or astrological the earlier versions may have been.

The composers of the various Puranas all seem to have had specific purposes for selecting the myths they included in their tomes. Some Puranic accounts of the Tara-Moon incident emphatically describe Tara's beauty and the pleasures of her union with Moon; others (including the *Srimad Bhagavata*) emphasize the Moon's hatred for Jupiter; and the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana* (IV.79.63) uses this story to explain the reason for the moon's phases and eclipses. One very important reason for including the Tara-Moon affair in a Purana was to emphasize that one of the principal ancestors of Lord Krishna (one of Vishnu's most famous avataras) was not married to the woman whose child he sired. The fact that womanizing was in His pedigree helps to explain why Krishna believed in loving other men's wives. In ordinary hands this might be devolution, but in the context of a living text like the *Srimad Bhagavata* it is an evolutionary development.

Genealogy and Narrative

Pedigree is as important to mythical beings as it is to race horses, and the authors of the Puranas relied much on the establishing of ancient lineages to explain some of the personality traits of descendant deities. Lineages and genealogies are also used to help tie the Vedas to the Puranas. For example, given that both Soma and semen relate to the Moon, and that Mercury is the Moon's son, the story of Ila/Sudyumna and the planet Mercury with its male-female sex changes may have some relation with the passage in the Vedic Soma sacrifice in which the *neshtr* priest becomes female in order to receive semen from the *agnidhra* priest for transfer to the sacrificer's wife. This sort of mythic lineage strategy was first made public in the Brahmana texts, which used genealogies both to divinize the cosmos and the Vedas, and to establish a relationship between their reality and the seers who saw that reality. Because every 'thing' in the universe has origins, genealogy became one method through which to show how those origins trace back to the One. The story of a Visage of Reality is a part of its genealogy, and just as a child recapitulates all of evolution as it grows in the womb, the early incarnations of a god appear in its story as the causes of its later ones. Genealogies also serve Jyotish, as in the case of Mercury and Saturn, who are the sons of the Moon and the Sun respectively, and who because they are father and son do not obstruct one another under certain conditions where other planets would create obstruction.

The story of each living oral tradition forms a lineage of transmission, a saga of how that living wisdom was successfully handed down from guru to disciple. All forms of living Indian wisdom, sacred and secular, have been passed down orally over the centuries, and some such lineages have persisted in India for thousands of years. Vedic knowledge was once transmitted wholly orally, so much so that the Vedas were not even written down until recent centuries. In fact, in ancient times the very act of writing made one temporarily unfit to handle knowledge: "A pupil should not recite the Veda after he has eaten meat, seen blood or a dead body, had intercourse, or engaged in writing." (*Aitareya Aranyaka* 5.5.3, quoted Coburn p. 4) The knowledge which matured into the Puranas and Tantras thus was written down only after it had become substantially fossilized. My mentor even used to claim that something had always to be wrong with any written Tantra, because only an impure disciple would attempt to confine living wisdom in a jail of paper behind bars of ink.

While emphasis was put on the sound of words during Vedic times, and interpretation of a Vedic hymn was always secondary to its accurate recitation, in Puranic times sound began to take a back seat to literal meaning, which was easier to consign to print than were intonations. The flavor of the original oral tradition, in which professional bards freely orchestrated emotion to achieve catharsis in themselves and their listeners, is frequently missing from the portions of the Puranas which reflect the later written tradition. Perhaps this omission of the natural human experience of tension and release aimed to teach its readers the importance of a detached attitude toward life, or perhaps Brahmanization, with its penchant for achieving ritual purity through total control of the environment, expressed its innate fear of emotions by doing away with them altogether in its myths. In Giorgio

Bonazzoli's opinion, Puranic mythology developed in response to the *Upanishads*, a group of texts which tried to rationalize everything, even to the detriment of myth. Perhaps the writers of the Puranas felt duty-bound to justify their myths by rationalizing them, much as some of today's advocates of alternative medicine seek to gain official recognition of their therapeutic modalities by willfully conforming to modern medicine's paradigm.

Whatever may be the reason, in many parts of the Puranas the living story suffocates under the dead weight of the cultural baggage appended to it by its redactors. While the Vedas talk openly and freely about fertility and sexuality, later texts prefigured the Victorian mania for covering nakedness by bowdlerizing some myths. Here is one version of the story of how the planet Venus gained his name: "Venus was doing penance for thousands of years seated in Shiva's body and the Lord growing merciful brought him out. He was completely white by remaining so long inside the Lord's stomach and hence was named Shukra." (Kadalangudi, p. 40) While it is true that *shukra* means white, it is much more to the point, both etymologically and astrologically, that *shukra* means semen. The reader would never suspect this, however, from this rendition.

It is possible that the written word only began to gain ascendancy, and thus sanctity, when the majority of people began to lose the prodigious memories needed to maintain a culture on oral narrative alone. Although the written word has since sought to supplant the oral word, it has been unable to do so, for it is difficult to finally extirpate any Indian tradition. Literalists may cling to writing, but those who wish to truly comprehend the living wisdom within a text must seek it in a living oral tradition, for ". . .

understanding the text does not necessarily mean attaining an intellectual mastery of its contents." (Coburn, p. 152) Social and cultural knowledge continues to be organized around narrative in India even today. Narrative is used as a way of thinking, as a method of reasoning, as an inquiry into the nature of what is, and as a means of creating specific mental and emotional states in both its tellers and its listeners. One avenue along which narrative continues to display its superiority is in the continued use of living stories as upayas for planetary depradations.

VRATA KATHA

A *mahatmya* (*mahatma* = "great soul," and *mahatmya* = "particular greatness") is both a chronicle of something's greatness and an appreciation of that chronicle's own greatness ("The Greatness of Saturn" is the *Shani Mahatmya*). Among the many mahatmyas are those dedicated to certain lunar months, to certain lunar days, and to each of the days of the week. While both prose and verse mahatmyas are common, all mahatmyas are meant to be related orally. They may be told by professional storytellers (*kirtankars*), who frequently include music into their performances as a sort of refrain, or they may be read or recited by indivdual priests or devotees.

When a mahatmya is connected with some sort of vow it becomes a *vrata katha*, a "special ritual tale." A vrata katha is a class of living story (*katha*) that is told ritually on a sacred day as part of a vow (*vrata*). To read your vrata katha silently is good, to recite it or hear it recited is better, but it is even better to cause others to hear it; by doing this you help yourself, help those others, and also help the tale by propagating it. Even an ordinary story may be promoted to the rank of vrata katha when it is recounted with devotion, in public or private, by a specialist or a layperson, on a holy day in a holy way. "The Greatness of Saturn" thus becomes a vrata katha when it is recounted with sincerity for the relief of planetary affliction. The individual planetary myths it contains can be used remedially for each planet when used on the day of the planet concerned, and recitation of the entire tale on Saturdays works remedially for all nine of the Nine Grahas, and particularly for Saturn, the most important graha of all.

Tales like "The Greatness of Saturn" have "a ritual within a tale, and the tale within the ritual." (Ramanujan 1986, p. 54) Such stories of difficulties and their ritual resolution invite listeners to resolve their own difficulties in similar ritual fashion. A vrata katha is the expression of a deity's being via mythic narrative, and its mantric value arises from the way in which its story is told and received. Both the teller and the listeners who participate in a vrata katha with faith and devotion receive benefits therefrom. Ritual perfection is much less a requisite for a vrata katha than it is for a formal Vedic sacrifice, but faith and devotion are perhaps even more necessary. In some cases of extremity a formal vow is not even necessary for a vrata katha to be accepted by the appropriate celestial authorities, should they deem your desire to be a vow. One vrata katha relates the following story:

> Of old there was a couple who, because they had no issue, took in their old age a neighbor girl as their daughter. Because she had worshipped Mars in a previous birth she was beautiful and talented, and created gold from her body daily. Her new family therefore became rich. When she came of age she married, but on the way to her father-in-law's house the new couple was captured by brigands, who beat her husband to death and stole everything. The bride cried inconsolably and, seeing

herself without any other option decided to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Since all this happened on a Tuesday the girl's decision was deemed by the gods to be a vow. A celestial being then suddenly appeared, and when the distraught lass asked him who he was he replied, "I am the god Mars. Pleased with your devotion to your husband, I shall give you whatever boon you desire." She quickly asked for her husband's life, which was returned to her. Then Mars became invisible.

Most people make tales into vrata kathas in a more formal way, usually either fasting or eating once only (avoiding salt) on that graha's weekday, and trying to observe total purity of mind, speech and action all day long. After thoroughly cleaning the place where the ritual will be performed (one of the best locations for a vrata katha is the ground beneath certain varieties of tree), they install an image of the appropriate graha there. Today the likeness used is most frequently a printed image of the god or goddess who is associated with the graha. This image is nowadays commonly called a "photo," for a sincere devotee relates to any such semblance as if it were literally a photo of the deity. When all is in readiness, the devotee commences the process' preliminary stage, which prepares the stage for the graha's entrance. The preliminaries (*purvakarma*) involve inviting the graha or grahas in question to descend to earth to be worshipped, ritually worshipping them once they arrive and requesting them to remain there to personally hear the recitation of the tale. While the ritual continues, that graha is usually taken to be the embodiment of the One True God, supreme in all ways. After the worship is over an final offering is made which is held in the hand or placed near the graha's image to remain there until the narrative ends.

The ritual worship attunes the worshippers' minds to focus more efficiently on the purpose for the event, induces performers and attendees alike to visualize the deity they invoke, and fills devotees with the kind of devotion needed to get the most from the katha. If the preliminaries have been properly performed then during the recitation, which is the day's primary event (*pradhanakarma*), the image of the graha will appear within the storyteller. Those listeners whose devotion is sufficiently deep and sincere, and who visualize the action as it occurs, will have darshana of that image via that storyteller. Darshana of the graha will cause them to experience its essence, to some degree, which is likely to lead them, at the story's climax, to some degree of catharsis. After the story culminates comes the final stage of the recitation (*paschatkarma*), during which a gift is offered to the storyteller and *prasada* (consecrated worship material) is distributed to everyone else. Prasada for a vrata katha is usually one of the foods ruled by the graha in question, but poor penitents use whatever they can, including chickpeas and raw sugar. While all listeners take prasada on such occasions, the clever also take away with them the image whose darshana they have been vouchsafed and the relief that image induced within them. When the entire process is repeated once a week, the sincere listener enjoys the benefits of a weekly emotional and spiritual renewal.

The process of transmission is thus central to the experience of a vrata katha: the transmission of the graha's image to the teller of the tale, the transmission of that image from the teller to the listener, and the transmission of the tale from one person to another, and from one generation to the next. Vrata kathas can be stories extracted from the Vedas or the Puranas, they can be folktales handed down within a family, or they can be some combination of these two. Because the story's specific content is less important than the way in which it is told, the content of a vrata katha which is not limited to a Sanskritic myth can very quickly be bent to what sometimes are extremely specific purposes. A. K. Ramanujan notes that when classical myths are borrowed and retold by folk performers, the gods and heroes therein are domesticated, and the action is localized and contemporized, sometimes satirically. Though such current Indian vrata kathas can still do good if they are properly performed, their very specificity tends to limit their potential benefits to specific and often humdrum benefits.

Mundane assistance is the kind of help preferred by most of the people who go to professional storytellers in India. Such folk performers are often drawn from the ranks of those who were denied direct access to Vedic knowledge by the caste of Brahmanas: members of low castes, followers of heterodox sects and, in particular, women. Such performers, who usually possess knowledge that their listeners lack, serve a priest-like role of interlocutor between the deity and its devotees. Ideally, such tellers of vrata kathas are sufficiently aligned with their stories that they are actually seized and possessed by the spirits of those grahas during their performances, but since such intense emotional states are rare, many professional storytellers in India tend to rely on theatricality to produce cathartic effects.

Those vrata kathas which are performed at home, for an audience that is usually made up of family and neighbors, are today primarily performed by women for the purpose of safeguarding their husbands and families. It is entirely likely that vrata kathas have formed a major part of the religious performance of Indian women for thousands of years, and that then as now vrata kathas were more important to women as religious practices than were Vedic or other organized, 'official' rituals. Evidence collected from the earliest Vedic texts suggests that the status of women was relatively high during their era, and that some Vedic sacrifices, including those to Raka, Sinivali, and Kuhu (the personifications of the full-moon day, the eve of the new moon, and new-moon day respectively) may have once been performed by women for women. But in the later Vedic era women's station dropped precipitously and continued to drop thereafter until there was no place left for a woman at a Vedic sacrifice unless she happened to be the wife of one of the officiants or sponsors.

The relegation of women's spirituality to the home has ensured that their versions of Indian myths, which some call "grandmothers' tales," are the paths along which children are introduced to their culture. Each new story is a challenge for both brain and mind; each helps develop individual ability to visualize while propagating the myth. Vrata katha often acts to formalize and ritualize a story which explains some cutural custom or observance. For example, one Vedic conception that has persisted in Indian folklore is the idea that the Moon possesses nectar which it periodically releases to the earth. The legend of Kojagiri Purnima holds that the Moon 'sweats' nectar one night each year, and that its nectar can be collected in milk on that particular night. The ceremony that develops around the milk, the Moon, and the elixir those two create offers a charming darshana of the Moon's image to each participating family member.

Examples of Vrata Kathas

Whatever the influences that have molded them, the current forms of the stories used in popular vrata kathas for the Nine Planets are more concerned with how humans can help themselves than with the cosmology or the symbolic signficances of the grahas themselves. These tales have been so 'domesticated' over the centuries that the "ray" that is the graha has been thoroughly fragmented, and today's commonly performed vrata kathas provide little of the sweep of the original myths. The vows themselves remain, for once a tradition develops in India its roots burrow so deeply into the cultural soil that it never really disappears, but the vow's focus has in some instances totally changed. Friday vows, for instance, were once done for the planet Venus, but Venus appears to have disappeared from view in popular katha literature, replaced there by the various forms of the Great Goddess. The most recent versions of the Friday katha all focus on Santoshi Ma, a goddess who was practically unheard of thirty years ago, whose cult developed as a result of the dramatic success of a Hindi film dedicated to her miracles!

Annapurna

In Benaras, Annapurna (the goddess of food) is sometimes worshipped for a Friday vow with the story of Dhananjaya, who lived in Benaras with his pious wife Sulakshana ("Good Sign"). When Sulakshana advised her husband to exert himself spiritually, he worshipped Lord Shiva, fasting from food and water for three days. At the end of the third day Lord Shiva whispered into Dhananjaya's ear: "Annapurna Annapurna Annapurna." When the man asked a learned Brahmana what this word could mean, the Brahmana, thinking of the word's literal meaning (*anna-purna* = "full of food") told him, "You have had no food or water for three full days. This is just your hunger speaking; go home and eat!" But Dhananjaya's wife knew that this was a mantra, and she advised her husband to resume his worship until he got an answer. This Dhananjaya did, which led him to meet a group of celestial damsels who were all repeating "Annapurna Annapurna Annapurna." After they explained Annapurna's vow to him Dhananjaya also began to perform the vow, and he did so so well that his prosperity increased manyfold. He became so prosperous that he decided to marry a second wife, but this wife interrupted his sadhana, which created problems in his life. He then wisely returned to Sulakshana, and the two of them lived together in happiness for many years thereafter.

Dhananjaya's talented wife gave her husband good advice, but when he became prosperous he wanted a different woman. Sulakshana's patience eventually pays off when Dhananjaya returns to her. Many vrata kathas focus on the getting or the keeping of a husband, particularly Monday's vow, which lasts for at least sixteen consecutive Mondays. In one account, each time one woman succeeds another asks her how she did it, and when the questioner hears she too does the sixteen-Mondays vow and succeeds. An alternate Monday version is used for childless women to obtain or protect a child. The Moon has been eclipsed from most contemporary versions of the Monday vows, which now involve worship of Lord Shiva and his wife Parvati. The slim connection which remains is iconographic, for Shiva carries a crescent Moon on his forehead.

Mangaliya

Tuesday vows for Mars often focus on protection, for Mars is the accident causer and the ruler of fire. A certain woman who bore her only son late in life named him Mangaliya, because he was born on Tuesday (*Mangala* = Mars, whose day is Tuesday). One day the god Mars came to her in the form of a wandering mendicant to test her. When he asked for alms, she said she would provide whatever he asked. He replied, "Are you sure? If I ask, you will have to do it." When she agreed, he told her, "Bring your son to me; I want to cook my food on his back." Now she was stuck, for she had promised. Saturated with anguish, she watched as the boy lay down and Mars put firewood on his back and lit it. After his food was cooked Mars asked the woman to call her son to eat. She said, "What are you saying? Can such miracles occur? Now eat, and go." He replied, "Just call the boy." When she called "Mangaliya!" up the boy rose and came to his mother, as she stammered in amazement.

Ramu

One Wednesday story also relates to protection:

Once a newly-married man named Ramu went to visit his father-in-law, after the traditional waiting period that follows marriage ceremonies, to collect his wife and take her to her father-in-law's house. Ramu was welcomed with every sign of hospitality, and after spending several days with his in-laws he asked leave to go. But his father-in-law told him, "Today is Wednesday. Women aren't permitted to set off on auspicious journeys of this sort on Wednesdays. Go tomorrow instead." But Ramu was a stubborn man, and though his father-in-law pleaded, the young couple departed.

After some hours on the road, when Ramu's wife became thirsty she asked her husband for some water. Ramu stopped at the next well to fill a pot for her, but on his way back from the well he found another man in the vehicle with his wife. This other man was Ramu's spitting image, and was wearing the same clothes. Since both men claimed to be Ramu an argument began, which drew a crowd. Everyone asked the bride to identify her husband, just as Damayanti identified King Nala when the gods themselves took on his form to test her cleverness, but the girl could give no answer because both men looked exactly alike.

At this point the king's soldiers arrived, and, not being able themselves to decide between the two, prepared to arrest the real Ramu, who was still carrying the water pot. Ramu now became frightened and prayed desperately to the Lord. Suddenly there came a divine voice from the skies: "This is all Mercury's illusion; this mix-up occurred because this man insisted upon travelling with his wife on Wednesday. Worship Mercury now for relief." Ramu promptly hymned Mercury, and the imposter disappeared. Thereafter both Ramu and his wife always observed Mercury's day.

Whoever reads or hears this story will have no problems should he/she travel on a Wednesday.

Golden Barley and Golden Basket

A Thursday story illustrates how important it is to strictly follow a vow's conditions if you hope it to change your fate:

Of old there was a Brahmana who was miserably poor because his wife had the very dirty habit of eating leftovers first thing in the morning and only then worshipping God and performing her chores. After many years of childlessness the couple somehow obtained a gem of a daughter, who from an early age worshipped Lord Vishnu every day and worshipped Jupiter each Thursday. Her devotion earned her this ability: she would strew barley on the road on her way to school, during the day it would turn to gold, and on her way back she would collect it. One day as she winnowed the barley, her father told her, "For golden barley you need a golden winnowing-basket." Next Thursday she announced to God, "If my vow is true, give me a golden winnowing-basket," and on her way back home from school she found one.

On the next day the local prince saw her winnowing with her golden winnowing-basket and became enchanted with her beauty, character, and talents. Using the excuse of illness he returned to the palace and lay down. When the Queen learned of his indisposition and came to ask him what medicine could cure him, the prince replied, "None, unless I can have the girl with the golden winnowing-basket for my wife." The king accordingly sent for the girl, and her father gave her away to the prince.

After her departure the Brahmana became as poor as before, and each day was a torture for him. Finally he swallowed his pride and approached his daughter for help. She told him, "Respected Father, if you will send Mother here I will tell her which method to employ to solve this problem." When her father did send her mother, the girl told her: "Respected Mother, if you will perform ritual worship every morning, paying careful atttention to purity, all will be well." But her mother paid no attention and did as usual, eating old leftovers first thing in the morning.

Then the girl directed that her mother be kept in a closed room overnight. The next morning the girl had her mother bathed, and made her perform her worship before having any breakfast. This procedure so improved the older woman's power of discrimination that she began to observe Jupiter's vow. She and her husband then became happy and rich, and after their deaths they proceeded to heaven.

The Guilty Neighbor

The following story, which is said to be particularly beneficial for the blind and lepers, stars an old woman whose devotion to the Sun inadvertently helps out both herself and her king:

An old woman was engaged in the Sunday vow, as a result of which she became prosperous. Her neighbor lady became envious of this success and, saying to herself that the old woman's prosperity was due to using her (the neighbor's) cowdung, the neighbor lady kept her cow tied in the house so that the old woman would get no dung. Next Sunday when the old woman could collect no dung she became downcast at this impediment to her worship. Because she could not plaster her floors with a fresh coating of cowdung she could not offer anything to the Sun, and so she could eat nothing all day long. That night she resignedly went to bed, tortured by hunger and thirst, and sick with worry. In a dream she saw Lord Sun asking the cause of her misery. On hearing of the interruption to her vow, the Sun's compassion began to flow and he promised to gift her a cow for that purpose. Lord Sun told her that he was very happy at how assiduously she was observing the vow, and promised her that her lineage would always be full of wealth and descendants. Then the Sun disappeared.

Next morning when the old woman arose and saw a cow with calf standing calmly in her courtyard she recalled that vivid dream of the Sun. She then quickly tethered the cow outside the house and arranged for all her needs. When the envious neighbor saw the cow outside the old woman's house, her amazement knew no bounds, and then she was struck dumb when she saw the cow lift her tail and release gold from her bowels instead of cowdung. The neighbor lady then so stealthily exchanged that golden dung for some of her own cow's natural dung that the old woman didn't come to know about it.

After a few days of this, the Sun asked himself, "What is this? How can it be that my cow is not solving this old woman's problems?" After he had understood the situation, he used his delusive powers to create a terrible wind storm, so strong that ancient trees toppled to the ground. Seeing this vision of destruction the old woman took her cow into the house and tied her there, and next morning the cow presented her new owner with some golden dung. Overjoyed, the old woman began to keep the cow inside all the time to protect her.

Now that the old woman's alertness allowed the neighbor woman no opportunity to steal the golden dung, that neighbor's greed impelled her to try to obtain the cow by stratagem. She went to the king and made this submission: "Great King! My old neighbor has a gold-shitting cow. If your majesty were to take it for himself it would mean a gain for all the people of our country." Caught up in this projection of greed, the king ordered his soldiers to bring him the cow. When they did, the cow was handed over to the cowherds, who were told not to remove any of her dung.

That night the king couldn't sleep for satisfaction, but next morning when he went to the cowshed he saw — nothing other than normal cowdung. The king's fire of rage now flared up, and he had the old woman arrested and brought to him. He asked her, "Doesn't your cow give golden dung? That is why I had her brought to me. Then why is it not happening?" When the old woman recounted the whole story to the king he was satisfied, and said, "Forgive me, Old Mother; I stole the cow out of ignorance. Your neighbor is the guilty party, and she will be punished." The king then ordered the whole city to perform the Sunday vow, as a result of which he conquered his enemies in all directions, extending his kingdom thereby.

Thursday

Someone has observed that one way in which stories get passed along in the USA of today is in the form of the chain letter, and in fact "Santoshi Ma chain letters" have recently begun to surface all over India. Kathleen M. Erndl quotes one such letter (in *Victory to the Mother*, p. 145); like its Western counterparts this missive promises miracles for cooperative propagators and predicts doom for those who skeptically or heedlessly break the chain. In the following Thursday tale, the chain that must not be broken is the chain of an individual's Thursday observances:

Of old there was a merchant who made pots and pots of money by undertaking trading voyages to foreign countries. He was a big-hearted man, always ready to help out those less fortunate than himself. His wife did not approve of this habit at all, for she was so miserly that it displeased her to see him spend even a penny.

One day, some weeks after the merchant had filled a ship with goods and had sailed off on yet another trading expedition, Lord

Jupiter took the form of a sadhu (wandering holy man) and, visiting the merchant's house, begged alms from his skinflint of a wife. She told him, "O Great Soul! I have reached my limit with this generosity business. My husband's entire wealth is being looted by this sort of donation! You please come up with some method by which all our wealth will be destroyed so that neither will it be looted nor will I be miserable because of its being looted. If you know such a method be so kind as to tell me about it."

Lord Jupiter replied, "O goddess, you are exceedingly peculiar! Everyone wants wealth and progeny. Even a sinner longs to have a son and money in his home. If you have an extreme excess of wealth then you should open your heart and perform charity: feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, build dormitories for pilgrims, provide means for poor orphan girls to be married, and do other sorts of meritorious activities so that you will have riches both here and in the next world."

But the merchant's wife was both very stubborn and very impolite: "Great Soul!" she insisted, "I don't want to hear any more of this from you. I have absolutely no use for the sort of wealth that I have to make so much effort to deal with, either by storing it safely or by going around distributing it to people. All my time gets taken up by this business!"

Lord Jupiter said, "O goddess! It is truly a matter of great grief that this thought has manifested in your mind. But, if this is your desire, then let it be so. For seven Thursdays plaster your whole house with yellow clay, and wash your hair with that same clay. Have your husband's hair cut on that day, have meat and wine with your meals, and wash all your clothes then, and voila! Your wealth will be destroyed." Having said this, Jupiter disappeared.

The woman set out to do as suggested for seven Thurdays, and by the sixth all her money was gone, and she herself had gone on to the next world. Her husband's ship sank, and he saved himself with great difficulty by holding tenaciously to a wooden chair. Distraught over his loss he wended his way to his hometown, where he saw that everything he had had was gone. When he asked his young daughter what had happened she became hysterical and told him the whole story. He calmed the girl, and decided to support himself by going into the forest daily and collecting wood to sell.

One day his daughter broached to him her desire to eat yogurt, but he had not even a single penny with which to purchase it. Assuring her that he would bring some home with him at the end of the day, he went off into the jungle, where he sat beneath a tree and, thinking of his previous condition, wept bitterly.

It was a Thursday. Seeing his condition, Jupiter again took the form of a sadhu and, strolling up to where the merchant was sitting, said, "Woodcollecter, what is that worry that has you weeping here in this jungle?"

The merchant said to him, "Reverend sir, you know everything," and indeed, his wet throat and glistening eyes told Jupiter the whole story. Jupiter then told him, "Brother, you are in this state because your wife insulted Jupiter on a Thursday; but don't you worry about a thing now. God will make you even wealthier than before if you will read the story of Jupiter's greatness every Thursday. Get two pennies worth of chickpeas and raisins and put a pinch of sugar into your waterpot to represent the nectar of immortality. After offering these to Lord Jupiter, if you will distribute them to all the members of your family and to those who hear the story, and you consume some yourself, then God will satisfy all your heart's desires."

Seeing the sadhu in a magnanimous mood made the merchant say, "O lordly one! From the wood I gather I don't even earn the two extra pennies I need to purchase yogurt for my only daughter, though I give her a false assurance every day that I will bring it back for her in the evening."

Jupiter replied, "O king among devotees! Don't you worry. If you go to sell your wood in town on a Thursday you will earn four pennies extra on that day, from which you can purchase two pennies worth of yogurt to feed your daughter and then use the other two pennies to purchase chickpeas and raisins and perform Jupiter's vow on that day. Add only the slighest pinch of sugar to the water to make it nectarian, and if you distribute the prasāda and eat some too all your dreams will come true." Having stated this, Jupiter disappeared.

Thursday crept slowly nearer, and finally dawned. The merchant collected his wood and went to sell it in the city, where he did indeed receive four pennies more than usual. He took his windfall and divided it between yogurt for his daughter and materials for his Jupiter worship. He performed the vow assiduously, distributed the remains, and then, satisfied with his labors, he himself ate. From that day forward all his hardships began to recede — until the next Thursday, when he was so engrossed in the improvement that was coming over his fortunes that he forgot to perform Jupiter's vow and failed to recite his tale.

That Friday the king announced that he had ordered preparations made for an immense sacrificial ritual to be performed on Saturday. He ordered everyone in town not to light their hearth fires on that day but rather to come to the sacrifice and be fed, adding that anyone who contravened this order would be impaled on a sharp stake. Following the king's command, everyone in town came to the palace the next day to eat — everyone that is except the merchant and his daughter, who arrived too late to eat with everyone else. The king therefore called them into the palace itself to eat. After they had eaten and returned home, the queen noticed that the peg on which she had hung her exceedingly expensive necklace was now empty. She decided then and there that the woodgatherer and his daughter must have flicked it. Immediately she sent her soldiers to arrest them, and they were thrown promptly into jail, where they both became endlessly miserable.

Then Lord Jupiter appeared there in that jail and said to the merchant, "O sovereign among devotees! You are mired in your current condition because you forgot to perform Jupiter's vow during this past week. But do not entertain even the shadow of an apprehension about your fate. Next Thursday you will find two pennies near the jail's door. Use this money to send out for chickpeas and raisins. Then worship Jupiter properly and listen carefully to his story, and all your miseries will fly far away."

As soon as the next Thursday dawned the merchant rushed eagerly to the main gate of the prison, where he did indeed find two pennies lying. A woman in the street outside the jail was passing by the main gate at that moment, and he hailed her: "O goddess! Please go to the market and get me chickpeas and raisins so that I can perform the Thursday vow for Jupiter." She said, "I'm on my way to get some clothes stitched for my soon-to-be daughter-in-law. Besides, what do I know of Jupiter?" And on she went about her business.

Shortly thereafter another woman came along, and he called to her plaintively, saying, "Sister! Please go to the bazaar and get me chickpeas and raisins so that I can perform Jupiter's Thursday vow." On hearing the name of Jupiter this woman, amazed, said, "Blessed be the name of that mighty Lord! I shall go and get your chickpeas and raisins right now. My only son has just died and I was going to purchase a cloth to wrap his body in, but I will do your work first and only then continue with my boy's funeral arrangements." The merchant gave her the pennies, she brought the chickpeas and raisins, and both listened to Jupiter's legends.

After it was over she went to purchase the wrapping cloth and was returning home when what did she see but the pallbearers, chanting "Ram Nam Satya He" (The Name of God is Truth), carrying her boy to be burned. She said to them, "Brothers, let me see my darling's face one last time." When they put corpse on ground she put into his mouth some of the sweetened water and the chickpeas and raisins that had been offered to Jupiter, and her son promptly sat up and flung himself around her neck.

The woman who had paid Jupiter no mind had returned home with the clothes for her son's bride, but as the wedding procession was departing with great fanfare, the horse on which the boy was sitting reared suddenly and threw him to the ground. He was so badly injured that he died within moments, and then that woman, convulsed with grief, began to beg pardon from Jupiter: "Oh Lord, forgive me my transgression!"

Hearing her prayer Jupiter took a sadhu's form and, arriving on the scene, said to that woman, "O goddess! There is no need whatsoever to raise such a ruckus. What you are experiencing now is merely the result of the disrespect you showed to Jupiter. Go at once to the jail and beg forgiveness of that devotee of Jupiter who is incarcerated there, and all will be well."

The woman went immediately to the jail and found the merchant near its front gate. Folding her hands prayerfully in front of her, she said: "O monarch among devotees! Because I did not heed your wishes and failed to bring you the chickpeas and raisins you needed for your worship, Lord Jupiter is now angry with me. My only son has just now fallen from the horse he was riding in his very own wedding procession and was injured so badly that he died on the spot." The merchant replied, "Mother, worry not. Lord Jupiter will set everything right. Come next Thursday and listen to his legends; until then, cover your son's body with flower essences, ghee, and other such fragrant substances to preserve it." This she did. On the next Thursday she returned to the prison, bringing with her two pennies worth of chickpeas and raisins and a small pot full of water, and seating herself at the gate, she listened to Jupiter's legends with full faith and concentration. After the recitation was over, she took the remains of the offerings and put them into her dead son's mouth. Instantly he began to breathe, and after a few moments he sat up, then stood up. After embracing him long and lovingly, she and her son returned home and started to sing Jupiter's praises to whomever would listen.

That night Jupiter appeared to the king in a dream and said, "O King! That merchant and his daughter whom thou hast locked up are innocent. Release them from captivity as soon as the Sun appears tomorrow morning! Thy queen's valuable necklace is even now dangling from its peg." The next morning the queen did in fact see her priceless bauble hanging where it belonged, and the king immediately released the merchant and his daughter from the jail, had them clothed in fine raiment, and begged forgiveness of them for having wronged them. He gifted half his kingdom to the merchant and arranged for his daughter's marriage to the scion of one of the city's most eminent families, providing her with priceless diamond jewelry as dowry.

Lord Jupiter fulfills one's heart's desires. By performing his vow, the ill become healthy, the penniless become wealthy, the childless obtain children, the downtrodden obtain fame and glory, and increase in all things occurs. Life becomes joyful and worries flee far away merely by hearing or reading this katha.

Another version of this tale features a king and a queen instead of the merchant and his wife; the king is forced to cut wood to make money, and the queen doesn't die but is eventually saved. In yet another rendition, the planet Jupiter is replaced by Mushkil Gusha, The Remover of All Difficulties. This tale, which is known all throughout Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, is Muslim instead of Hindu, Thursday night being important because it is the night before Friday, the Muslim sabbath. "It is believed that if this story is recited on Thursday nights, it will in some inexplicable way help the work of the mysterious Mushkil Gusha, Friend of Man." (Shah, p. 130) The story of Mushkil Gusha begins with a poor woodcutter who once got into a great deal of trouble but was saved by Mushkil Gusha. When he told his story to his daughter, and they ate their last food, which happened to be a handful of dried dates, a disembodied voice spoke to him: "Although you may not know it yet, you have been saved by Mushkil Gusha. Remember that Mushkil Gusha is always here. Make sure that every Thursday night you eat some dates and give some to any needy person and tell the story of Mushkil Gusha. Or give a gift in the name of Mushkil Gusha to someone who will help the needy. Make sure that the story of Mushkil Gusha is never, never forgotten. If you do this, and if this is done by those to whom you tell the story, the people who are in real need will always find their way." (Shah, p. 130)

The woodcutter then earned lots of money until one Thursday he forgot to repeat the story of Mushkil Gusha. He then fell afoul of the local princess, who claimed that the woodcutter's daughter had purloined her valuable necklace, and the king confiscated all the woodcutter's possessions, threw his daughter into an orphanage, and chained the woodsman to a post in the public square to make an example of him to the people. Time passed until one day he overheard someone say it was Thursday afternoon. Suddenly he remembered that he had forgotten to remember Mushkil Gusha for many days. "No sooner had this thought come into his head, than a charitable man, passing by, threw him a tiny coin." (Shah, p. 134) He begged the man to go buy dates with that coin,and to return and listen to the story. When the story was over, the generous man, who thought the woodcutter mad, went home to find that all his many difficulties had disappeared, a fact which made him think quite a lot about Mushkil Gusha. The next morning the princess found her necklace, whereupon the king released the woodcutter with a public apology, reunited him with his daughter, and everyone lived happily ever after. "These are some of the incidents in the story of Mushkil Gusha. It is a very long tale and it is never ended. It has many forms. Some of them are not even called the story of Mushkil Gusha at all, so people do not recognize it. But it is because of Mushkil Gusha that his story, in whatever form, is remembered by somebody, somewhere in the world, day and night, wherever there are people. As his story has always been recited, so it will always continue to be told." (Shah, p. 134)

Nimi's Queen

The Sun, Jupiter, and Saturn are the three grahas whose worship has best endured in India. People tend to worship Jupiter to regain or maintain prosperity, and worship Saturn to avoid or escape from adversity. If Jupiter, or Mushkil Gusha, is the Remover of All Difficulties, most people think of Saturn as Creator of All Difficulties. But Saturn appears everywhere, whether you want him to or not. Though our next vrata katha is meant to be recited on Wednesdays, Mercury, the lord of Wednesday, is made to share prominence in this tale with King Yama, who stands in here for Saturn. The significance of Mercury's ire and clemency in the life of Nimi's Queen seems upstaged by a more philosophical moral to this story: the inescapable influence of the Law of Karma in human life. Note that the tale is set in King Vikramaditya's home town of Ujjayini, the modern Ujjain, where ancient India's prime meridian was located, where the famous religious festival of the Kumbha Mela is held once every twelve years, and where about three hundred years ago Raja Man Singh built one of his five Jantar Mantars, observatories filled with huge instruments built of stone and mortar.

Once Vasistha Rishi visited the court of King Mandhata, who welcomed him warmly and asked, "What vow should I perform so that my people will be happy on Earth and go to heaven after they die?"

Vasistha replied, "That is a good question, O King! Everyone in the world is selfish but you, who care only for the welfare of others. There is such a vow, which your ancestor King Nimi performed when he ruled in Mithila. Nimi enjoyed profound self-awareness, but it made him haughty, due to which he once ridiculed the worship of the planet Mercury. Angered, Mercury caused his kingdom to be overthrown by invading kings, who slew Nimi and surrounded his city.

"His queen then thought, 'All my remaining relatives will be killed if we stay — better we should all sneak out of town.' So Nimi's queen took her son and daughter and sneaked out of Mithila by a secret passage into the jungle, where hunger and thirst tormented them for several days. In the course of these wanderings they somehow or other reached Ujjayini, where after much exertion the queen found work grinding grain into flour for a Brahmana. She set to work straightaway, but while she was grinding her children remained restless due to hunger, so she gave them seven measures of the flour she had ground, which they began to eat, raw.

"In the evening she was given quite a lot of flour in payment for her labor, with which she then pacified her own hunger. She forgot all about the flour she had stolen to feed her children, but

Yama, the King of Dharma, had seen it happen and had written it into his account book.

"Time passed slowly, very slowly, for the fugitive royals. The Brahmana, who was very pleased with their work, asked several times to know their story, but each time the queen put him off, until the day he looked into the palm of the queen's son. After a careful examination he said to the queen, 'This boy is prince of some kingdom, and one day he will be the master of a great empire. You people must be suffering because of some deity's ire.'

"Tears glimmered in the queen's eyes as she grasped the Brahmana's feet and begged for some way out of her pitiable predicament. The Brahmana thought for a moment and then said, 'This is due to Mercury's fury. If you will perform his vow and listen to his story, your miseries will definitely flee far from you.' He instructed them in the worship and the vow, and all three of those beings began to perform it. In the fullness of time Mercury became pleased with Nimi and his son, and determined to return the kingdom to their family, so he arranged for a revolution to sweep Mithila. A new king killed the usurper, and began a search for Nimi's son. The searchers finally reached that Brahmana's ashram at Ujjayini, where they found Nimi's family and carried them back to Mithila. There the boy was installed on the throne, after undergoing the regal baptism (rajabhisheka). His sister, the princess, married King Yama, and the Brahmana who had given the family shelter became the Royal Guru.

"The princess went to live in the King of Dharma's palace. King Yama forbade her to open the Palace's seven secret doors, so of course her interest in them increased a hundred fold. One day when the King of Dharma was out, busy with his work, the princess secretly opened one door. In front of her stretched a road which led toward hell. In hell she saw her mother, surrounded by an assortment of malefactors, being boiled in oil. This vision caused her perplexity to increase even more, so she opened all the doors, and saw her mother's punishment displayed behind each.

"When King Yama returned and she asked him about her mother's miserable plight, he replied, 'She stole seven measures of flour to feed you and your brother, and now she is enjoying the fruits of that theft.' When the girl asked for some remedy, the Dharma King said, 'Observe Mercury's vow.' Following Yama's advice the princess and her family observed Mercury's vow for twenty-seven Wednesdays, at the end of which they fed Brahmanas and gave them cows and gold,

and then distributed with appropriate festivity rice pudding and sugared pancakes as prasada throughout the town.

"Then Mercury appeared to them and said, 'The kingdom of Mithila will long remain with your family, and your mother will go to heaven.' Thereupon the heavenly chariot descended to earth amidst auspicious intonations, and Nimi's queen departed for paradise. Since that day everyone in Mithila worships Mercury and observes his vow."

Then Vasistha said to King Mandhata, "You and all your subjects should observe this vow, so that the prosperity of your kingdom will increase and everyone will go to Vaikuntha (the heaven of Vishnu) after death." They did, and they did, and anyone who does this will.

Saturn

Saturn's influence in planetary myth is relentless and unparalleled, and one reason that the ultimate Tantric upaya is to please Saturn is that he is so hard to please. The story of King Vikrama's Seven-and-a-Half is but one among the many Saturn-controlling stories still being told in India. In Gujarat many people read or listen to the story of Sudama, a story which removes scarcity from one's life. Sudama lost his luck when he cheated Lord Krishna out of some food, and many years later he regained good fortune in his life after journeying to obtain a blessing from Krishna.

Here is a North Indian story, attributed to the *Skanda Purana*, which uses Saturn as a foil to teach the value of truthfulness:

A king once invited merchants from all over the region to attend a big crafts fair, assuring each that he would purchase whatever did not sell. One blacksmith of limited intelligence brought an iron image of Saturn to this fair, and since no one purchased it, the king's officers procured it and delivered it to his majesty. That night in a dream, the king saw a luminous female form — obviously a goddess — leaving his body. "Who are you?" he asked in some alarm. "I am Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity," the figure replied. "I cannot remain in the same place where Saturn remains." The king saluted her respectfully but allowed her to depart.

Next emerged a male deity, Glory (vaibhava), who cannot remain with anyone who has no prosperity. The king allowed him to go as well. Then departed in order: Righteousness (dharma), Staunchness (dhairya), Compassion (daya), Forbearance (kshama), and a host of other virtues, but when Truthfulness (satya) prepared to leave the king grabbed his feet and would not let him go, saying, "I've never left you all these years, and you cannot leave me now."

All the other good qualities had been waiting outside the door for Truth to emerge, that they might all seek shelter elsewhere. When he did not appear after quite a long time, Righteousness finally said, "I have to go back; I can't exist without Truth," and so he returned. He was followed by all the others, in reverse order from their departure, and at the last even Lakshmi returned, telling the king, "It is thanks to your love of truth that you have all of us back; we could not resist. A fellow like you who holds to Truth won't ever be miserable."

Among other stories for Saturn is one in which a prince and his friend together perform Saturn's vow. The friend gains gold and offers the prince a share, but the prince insists that he must gain his destiny himself. The prince continues with his vow until he is finally rewarded with supernatural assistance to restore his kingdom to him and with a gandharva princess to be his queen. Another rendering of this story has Saturn come riding on a buffalo (the vehicle of Yama, the god of death) to test the two boys. Saturn sits hidden in a *pippala* tree and gives one boy the gold. The other then tells Saturn the story of Pippalada and calls him "The Slow Deity," at which Saturn informs him, "You are a fellow disciple of my guru," a sign that the boy has passed the test.

The story of Pippalada provides one explanation for how

Saturn became lame and slow: When Saturn afflicted the father of Pippalada with disease and penury, the angry Pippalada attacked the pippala tree on the banks of the River Yamuna in which Saturn sat. Saturn fled into the sky, but Pippalada followed him and broke both his legs. After Lord Shiva prevented the boy from killing Saturn outright, Pippalada said, "Very well, but his name will now be Manda ("the Slow"). Another legend that explains Saturn's lameness appears in the *Ramayana*, the epic of King Ramachandra. Ramachandra's foe Ravana, a great devotee of Shiva, had obtained control over all the Nine Planets. As his son Meghanada was about to be born, Ravana forced all the grahas into the eleventh house of Meghanada's horoscope, thinking that his boy's life would then be one success after another (a horoscope's eleventh house rules gains of all kinds). But at the moment of the baby's birth Saturn surreptitiously extended his foot into the child's twelfth house which, since it rules losses of all kinds, ruined the entire effect that Ravana was attempting to create. Enraged, Ravana chopped off Saturn's foot, leaving him lame.

Astrologically Saturn is "lame" because he is the slowest moving of the Nine Planets (an afflicted Saturn in a horoscope may literally indicate lameness). In North India they say that Time has very short hair on his neck, and runs very fast; people try to catch Him, but can't hold onto His hair. Saturn is Time, and Saturn's slowness also makes him easy to catch. Sincere penance and devotion, which are good ways to 'catch' Saturn, can make a significant difference in your ability to refrain from self-identifying with your limitations. No method can totally eliminate Saturn's effects, since all living beings are eternally subject to his influence; but worship can at least reduce their intensity. Direct worship of Saturn, or worship of Lord Shiva or of the monkey god Hanuman, is tested, effective ways to conquer "what comes naturally." Lord Shiva is the god of death and time and can influence Saturn because Saturn is effectively one portion of His power. Pippalada could punish Saturn thus because he and his wife Padma were incarnations of Lord Shiva and His wife Parvati. Hanuman can control Saturn because he is himself an incarnation of Shiva.

The super-powerful Hanuman, who appears in "The Greatness of Saturn" in the stories of the Sun and Jupiter, plays an important role in the *Ramayana.* In North India a portion of the *Ramayana* called the Sundara Kanda in which Hanuman stars is regularly read or recited as a general upaya for all sorts of troubles, and as a specific remedy for Saturnian afflictions. Hanuman also had to go through a Seven-and-a-Half, of course, like all other living beings do, but Saturn could do very little to afflict that noble monkey. One story has Saturn ask Hanuman, "You are so powerful, what part of your body can I afflict?" Hanuman told him, "Sit on my tail." When Saturn did, Hanuman's tail flipped over him and pinned him to the ground so that he could neither move nor gaze on Hanuman. Hanuman was saved from Saturn's influence then, but later he did have to suffer a bit when that portion of his tail that had pinned Saturn was set afire by Ravana's toadies.

In another tale, when Saturn told Hanuman that his Seven-and-a-Half was about to begin, Hanuman asked, "Which part of my body do you intend to inhabit?"

Saturn replied, "I will be sitting on your head."

Hanuman said, "Very well." When the appointed day duly dawned, and Saturn settled himself comfortably atop that monkey's head, Hanuman began to play a little game. He would take a heavy mountain, throw it high into the air, and let it slam onto his pate. After a few minutes of this, when Hanuman was just beginning to enjoy himself, Saturn cried out to him, "Stop! Let me get off! I'll leave you alone!"

Hanuman said to Saturn, "You mean you've had enough?" Saturn replied, "Yes, I've had enough. But at least I made you hit your head."

The Heroic King Vikramaditya

Despite all these powerful deities to focus on for relief from Saturn, "The Greatness of Saturn" concentrates instead on King Vikramaditya because he is a human being, a man who like other men and women must somehow find the courage to go beyond his limitations. King Vikrama's true heroism was to remain true to his principles, which even though it landed him in hot water eventually led him to triumph over his tribulations. His name, which can be interpreted to mean either "He Who Possesses the Valor of the Sun," or "The Sun of Bravery," or perhaps even "The Sun of Great Deeds," suggests both that he was the foremost among those who perform great deeds (as the Sun is the foremost among the planets), and that his great deeds made the luster of his glory shine as brightly as the Sun. A king's glory, which is composed of the luster of the astral world, descends on a king at the time of his anointment (*rajabhisheka*) when he becomes suffused with the image of 'kingliness.' It was King Vikrama's sterling qualities that made him a fit repository for the image of "kingliness," and so truly worthy of the title "king": "The king is God's chosen occupant of the divine viceregal office in his territory: God made him out of parts of other major, regal gods. It is his duty to maintain *dharma* by punishing those who offend against it and rewarding its defenders. . . . The king is identified with the highest male god of the locality." (Gupta and Gombrich, p. 124)

The King Vikrama of our story is clearly a mythic figure whose story may have been influenced by one or more of the Vikramadityas who have shone in history. The one who gave his name to the Vikrama Samvat, the calendrical era that began in 56 B.C., has sometimes been identified as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. Another historical Vikramaditya was Chandragupta II (ca. 400 A.D.), who once defeated the invading Huns. The eminent Indologist J.A.B. van Buitenen says of this Vikramaditya, "He has become the prototype of the ideal king, and his reign is regarded as the epitome of Indian culture." There is a good chance that the noted astronomer and astrologer Varahamihira was connected to the court of this Vikramaditya. If this is so, it would help to explain how the mythic Vikramaditya became interested in Jyotish. Vikramaditya was also the name of a dynasty, and Vikramaditya Harsha may well have been the King Vikramaditya whose court was graced by the famous poet Kalidasa.

It was probably a composite of many of these Vikramadityas who in the fullness of time amalgamated themselves into the one Vikramaditya who was elevated to legendary status. "[Mythic] figures often lend their names to historical persons and then vanish. Any attempt to tie them down to history, even to the tradition of great and catastrophic events, is invariably a sure way to a false trail. Historical happenings will never 'explain' mystical events." (de Santillana, p. 48) One of the original homes of the stories of Vikramaditya is the giant text known as the *Kathasaritasagara* ("The Ocean of the Streams of Story"), in which several kings with names like Vikramasena and Vikramasimha appear. It may be that all of these figures were conflated into our Heroic King Vikramaditya. Saturn, however, appears only once in that entire text, where he is named *Kalakopa* ("Black Anger," or, "The Anger of Time"). In that tale he was defeated in battle, along with Mercury and Mars, by Jupiter.

Vikramaditya's legend is now preserved primarily in the *Simhasana Dwatrimsika* "(Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne)", which was first written in Sanskrit, perhaps between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries A.D. It does not seem to have mutated much thereafter, for versions that closely resemble each other are still extant in all of India's major languages. The seventh of these thirty-two tales is another rendering of the story of Vikramadaitya's Seven-and-a-Half. Here the goddess Kali, King Vikrama's favorite deity, warns him of the danger and advises him to supplicate Saturn by prostrating before him, that the difficulties to come might be spread over the entire period of seven and one-half years instead of all concentrating together. When shortly thereafter Saturn limped into view Vikramaditya prostrated and supplicated as Kali had directed him to do. Pleased, Saturn sent the king to Mathura to become the servant of King Mathurendra for those years. King Vikrama then entrusted the ruling of his country to Saturn for that period and departed. Along the way an apsaras (celestial dancing maiden) joined him, as did a snake and a frog who had been kings in their previous births.

On reaching Mathura in disguise he entered into the king's service, guarding him during the day for a salary of one thousand gold coins (payable daily) and sporting at night with the apsaras while the snake and frog (who were shape-shifters) kept guard. Two courtiers who were jealous of Vikramaditya discovered the secret of the apsaras (who was ugly during the day and beautiful at night) and smuggled King Mathurendra into the courtyard so that he could peep at her. King Mathurendra determined then and there to take her into his harem ("her extraordinary loveliness went to his head like old wine"), so he began to give King Vikrama impossible tasks to perform. Unfortunately for him King Vikrama performed each task, winning for himself another beautiful maiden on each occasion. At the end of the seven and one-half years Saturn returned Vikrama's imperial signet to him, and the king returned to Ujjayini, none the worse for wear. Since during the course of the Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne King Vikrama marries every eligible woman that he encounters, it is possible that stylistic constraints prevented him from suffering too much during this portrayal of his Seven-and-a-Half. It was in his later years that this Vikramaditya's tribulations began to pile up.

The version of King Vikrama's story which graces "The Greatness of Saturn" is generally similar to but more detailed than a North Indian version which is still reprinted in Hindi in New Delhi. In that rendition the Nine Planets once got into an argument over who was the greatest graha of all. Since each thought of himself as great, the argument escalated without any clear result. They finally all trooped over to Indra and requested his thus: "O Indra! You as king of all the devas will be able to settle our disagreement by deciding which of us Nine Planets is greatest." Hearing these words Indra became terrified that the eight whom he did not choose would pounce on him, and told them, "I am not competent to decide which of you is greatest and which is least. But I can tell you how to decide. Right now King Vikramaditya is ruling down on Earth. He removes misery from the miserable; go to him and he is sure to remove this distress of yours."

Taking Indra's advice, all the Nine Planets went to Vikramaditya and related the whole story to him. Having heard it, King Vikrama thought long and hard about which planet to call great and which small. After long thought he came up with a method: He made nine thrones of nine metals — gold, silver, bronze, brass, lead, tin, zinc, mica and iron — and arranged them in that order (which may have been the order of their commercial value at that time). He then said, "Whose throne is first in line, he is first in greatness, and whose is last, he is last." The Sun, whose metal is gold, was immensely gratified at this, and all the other planets grumbled but accepted their lot — except Saturn, whose metal is iron. Infuriated at being thought least among the planets, Saturn warned Vikramaditya of what would befall him — and the rest of the story played out much as in the Gujarati version. Alternative renderings of this tale probably exist in South and East India too.

[A. K. Ramanujan retold as "Raja Vikram and the Princess of China" (Ramanujan 1991, pp. 251-261) a folk tale collected almost a hundred years earlier which possesses most of the elements of the Saturn story, but without Saturn.] A few other variations appear here too: King Vikramaditya sets out from his kingdom on his own initiative to marry the princess of China, who is the only person in the world who can save his kingdom from an evil sorcerer. Once in China, King Vikrama is falsely accused of stealing a necklace from the royal treasury of the Emperor of China when some thieves placed that ornament around his horse's neck. It is that Emperor who orders King

Vikrama's hands and feet to be cut off. The oilman brings Vikramaditya to his house on his own initiative, over his wife's bitter objections. When the oilman wants to bathe the king, Vikramaditya demands to be bathed in the waters of the princess's pool, and it is there that he sings Raga Dipaka. After this recital the princess of China, who knows King Vikrama's prowess, knows he is there, because of her secret sciences. She then insists that each oilman of the city bring her three tons of oil the next day, knowing that only Vikramaditya will be able to do so, with the help of the four *virs* (heroic spirits) who work for him, which he summons by singing Raga Bhairavi.

After the oil is delivered, the princess orders the oilman to bring the crippled Vikramaditya to her *swayamvara* (the ceremony during which a princess chooses her own husband). When he arrives there, she chooses him and then turns into an apsaras, who tells the king to ask a boon. He asks for limbs, which she gives him. He then displays himself in all his glory (with the help of the virs, who create a mansion, jewels, gold, and the like). The Emperor of China and all the disgruntled kings from the svayamvara (who in their ire had decided to kill King Vikrama) now acknowledge him, and when the evil sorcerer comes to try to kill King Vikrama, the princess/apsaras easily thwarts him. The king and his bride then return to Ujjayini and live happily for a satisfyingly long time.

The incident of Saturn's affliction of his guru surfaces in a North Indian tale of a king's minister who in a dream saw Saturn tell him that his king's Seven-and-a-Half was about to begin. After the minister bid the planet down from seven and one-half years to seven and one-half months, then seven and one-half days, and finally to one hour, he requested that hour of torture for himself, instead of for the king. Saturn agreed, and when that one hour began someone left the prince's severed head dangling at the minister's door while the minister sat inside worshipping the Lord. The king, shocked at such betrayal, sentenced the minister to die, and as the condemned man was led to the execution ground, the prince's funeral pyre was prepared. During all this the minister kept mum, knowing that the time simply had to pass. The prince's pyre was lit to burn him and the noose put around the minister's neck to strangle him, when just at that moment the hour was up. The prince then sat up on his pyre, and the noose automatically fell from the minister's neck. The king, after apologizing profusely, asked his minister, "What was this all about?" After learning the whole story, the king praised his devoted servant abundantly and rewarded him vigorously for his willingness to suffer in order that the country, embodied in the person of the king, might be spared.

Vikramaditya's Fate

The willingness to suffer for someone else, be it king (as in the case of the minister above) or populace (as in the boon King Vikrama begged from Saturn in "The Greatness of Saturn"), is one of the notable hallmarks of a noble being. On one level, Vikramaditya's story is an example of a "male-centered tale," in which a hero who leaves home searching for adventure must undertake difficult tasks before he achieves his fated attainments of fame, a kingdom, and a princess.

"Women are no more than pawns or prizes or helpers in his life's game. His antagonists tend to be male, though a stepmother or ogress might also want to get rid of him. The story usually ends with a wedding." (Ramanujan, p. xxiv) All this is true of King Vikrama's saga, but the similarities stop there. King Vikrama does get the girl, or girls, in the end, but they and the return of his kingdom are wholly secondary to his story. While in the typical male-centered tale the hero's departure is deliberate, King Vikrama's migration is due to fate, which is the essence of Saturn. The hero, who represents the reader's self, is the focus of a "male-centered tale." Vikramaditya, who also represents the individual self, and who was the most important man of his time, began his tale as a righteous but self-centered ruler of a kingdom, and loses his self-centeredness in the course of the narrative. Vikramaditya cannot be the center of "The Greatness of Saturn," except in the narrative sense, for he is not the ruler of his fate, as the average hero of a "male-centered tale" believes himself to be. Saturn is the ruler of Vikramaditya's fate, and Saturn taught the king, as he teaches each of us, to be prepared to sacrifice at a moment's notice all attachments to the everyday world.

Vikramaditya was pressed into service as Saturn's foil because, as in the Biblical story of Job, God felt confident that he would succeed when tested. In the course of his tale, King Vikrama indeed learns to accept his fate without struggle, and, like Job, the king can forgive everyone who wrongs him because they did nothing more than act out the roles fate had assigned them to play in his life. This is surrender to life as it is, not descent into fatalism. Nietzsche spoke of *Amor fati*, "love of one's fate"; Seneca said: *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* ("The Fates lead him who will; him who won't, they drag.") (quoted in Campbell, p. 125) Had he accepted Saturn in the beginning, the king would never have had any problems (or at least they would have been fewer), for once he accepts, all is well. It was necessary though that someone be dragged through the depths of Saturn's "play," that the rest of us who can learn from his example might be exempted from the worst of it. Like Jesus, who was crucified that we might be saved, King Vikrama asks that others be spared his misery.

As part of his penance the king had to withdraw from normal life; such is the nature of Saturn. "Saturn weakens energy and enthusiasm for the common life in order to highlight the extraordinary, the very depths of the soul." (Moore, p. 173-4) Sometimes it is a disease, or sometimes another crisis that by extracting us from our normal activities can act as an opening to a much fuller life, if we can refrain from trying to suppress or avoid the reevaluations into which it will lead us. Sometimes it is depression, which is also ruled by Saturn. James Hillman once said that "depression is an answer to widespread manic activism, and is a dying to the wild world of literalism. Feeling low and heavy, we are forced to move inward, turning to fantasy rather than the literal action of the ego. And that turn is necessary for the soul, for it creates psychic space, a container for deeper reflection where soul increases and the surface of events becomes less important." (quoted in Moore, p. 171) Those who work through their depression will find themselves emerging into deep contemplation, as King Vikrama did. His misery, once digested, emerged from him as song, as it should for everyone who loves the Lord.

The king did not grumble over his sufferings, or whine about how everyone had it better than he, or had it in for him. Instead of blaming other people, he blamed his own karmas. One of the least useful of human attitudes toward the cosmos is the "blaming phenomenon," in which everything except one's own self is held responsible for one's woes. Saturn is often the most blamed; in the words of my Jyotish guru, "Poor Saturn. He is crying because everyone blames him; but what can he do? It is part of his portfolio to make people experience Reality." Few are the people who long to become devotees of Saturn, but few are the people who succeed at tapping into life's true juices without first being melted in Saturn's forge. Though some prefer to take King Vikrama's story as a fantasy or allegory, there is greater benefit in identifying yourself with him and reading the story as if you were personally suffering through it as he did. When you self-identify with Vikramaditya you can temporarily surrender your normal nature, as he did, and come into a direct relationship with Saturn that you may go beyond your miseries to be freed from them, as the king was.

THE GREATNESS OF SATURN

A tale is handed down always with some little variation that its latest teller adds to it, and one of my purposes in publishing this rendition of "The Greatness of Saturn" was to encourage it to evolve. I grafted onto it some of the original living myths, Vedic and Puranic, in which the planets themselves are prominent — myths which have fallen by the wayside in current vrata kathas. I did no exhaustive literature search to find these myths; I took only the works that found me, that fell into my hands, the works that wanted to be reborn through this book. These are myths that are alive for me, that have meaning for me, the tale-teller, the 'deity' who enlivens the world of the tale like the Universal Soul enlivens the universe.

"The Greatness of Saturn" introduced itself to me in India and has now consented to be retold through me in the West. You may contemplate making this tale, or another mythic story like it, your own. If you decide to do so, you will have to import into your conceptual flowerbed enough contextual soil and fertilizer of faith to make it grow. You will have to open wide the gate of your being so that the rays of the sun that is the deity to whom it is dedicated can pass through you, unpolluted by your personal limitations, to fall upon and invigorate that story. You will have to water this myth with your own emotional juices, for every living story takes on something of its new owner. Once it has taken root you may be tempted to graft it, but if you dare to fiddle with it before it has been thoroughly integrated into your self-definition — before it becomes a part of you — you may kill it. Or, perhaps, it may kill you. Once it does become part of you it becomes your responsibility, and you will have to ensure that you graft onto it only those mythic shoots that the vidya who rules it provides to you, if you honestly wish it to evolve.

"The Greatness of Saturn" is more than just a plea for protection, a prayer for prosperity, or a free pass to travel on otherwise forbidden days. It is about the mental and emotional constrictions which prevent the juices from flowing in your life, and what you can do about them. If you want to get the most out of "The Greatness of Saturn" you will have to enliven it with your own sincerity. You will have to withdraw from your normal life once a week or once a month, open yourself to the book and let Vikramaditya and Saturn live again through you. Even if you still do not wholly understand this tale, you can open yourself to it and it will do good for you, as myths are wont to do. Every time you read it you have yet another opportunity to go beyond that which 'comes naturally' to you, a chance to be reborn as a living receptacle for the juices of life. Each time you read, hear, or recite this story you have yet another opportunity to have darshana of the image of that mighty graha who is in charge of your destiny, who holds your life in his hands.

There was once, in the city of Benaras, a man who had become expert in calculating Saturn's position in the sky. His calculations were so perfect that his fame reached the ears of Lord Saturn himself, who one day decided to come down to Earth to personally test this expert on his expertise. Saturn accordingly took the form of a Brahmana, and on meeting the astrologer asked him politely to locate Saturn's position at that very moment. The man made his calculations, couldn't believe his eyes, made them a second time — then suddenly realized what was happening and immediately lowered his head. Averting his eyes so that he would not be blasted by Saturn's fierce gaze, the man humbly said, "Lord Saturn, you are right in front of me, at this moment."

Lord Saturn sits in front of each of us at every moment, inviting us to surrender moment by moment to Reality, that we may be free. If you can live your life in continual remembrance of Saturn's presence, you will never need to mourn your fate, for you will have become truly conscious of the pervasiveness of the Realness of the Real. I bow low now to that omnipresent Lord Saturn who cannot be denied and offer him concentrated reverence from the depths of my humbled heart.

APPENDIX

Calculation of the Seven-and-a-Half

Jyotish uses almost exclusively the ***sidereal zodiac***, whereas most of Western astrology uses a ***tropical zodiac***. The tropical zodiac fixes as the beginning of Aries the point where the sun is found on the day of the vernal equinox, at the precise moment during the spring when day and night are precisely equal in length. Recall the Precession of the Equinox, the movement through space of the Earth's axis which causes the equinoctal points to change their position slightly each year. A sidereal zodiac fixes the position of 0° Aries in the sky at a certain precise point which does not vary as the equinoxes precess. From the sidereal point of view, the zodiac signs and the constellations for which they are named are always the same; when the Moon occupies the *sign* of Aries in the sidereal zodiac it can be located in the sky in the *constellation* of Aries, in any era. When, however, the Moon occupies the sign of Aries in the tropical zodiac, depending on its position in that sign, it may be found nowadays either in the constellation of Aries or in the constellation of Pisces. Three thousand years ago it might have appeared in the constellation of Taurus, six thousand years hence possibly in Sagittarius, and so on.

Because there is a difference of opinion about the year when the two zodiacs last coincided, there are differing opinions as to the precise size of the ***ayanamsha***, the correction factor which must be subtracted from the planet's tropical longitude in order to obtain its sidereal longitude (longitude = position of the planet along the circle of the zodiac). The commonest ayanamsha in use in Jyotish is the Lahiri ayanamsha. Table One provides a table of approximate ten-yearly ayanamshas for use in calculating the sidereal position of one's Moon; the ayanamsha for intervening years can be obtained by simple proportion.

Table One

Year	Ayanamsha
1900	22°28'
1910	22°36'
1920	22°45'
1930	22°53'
1940	23°01'
1950	23°10'
1960	23°18'
1970	23°26'
1980	23°35'
1990	23°43'
2000	23°51'

EXAMPLE: If you were born in 1958, 8/10 of the difference between the ayanamshas for 1950 and 1960 must be added to the ayanamsha for 1950. Since that difference is 18' - 10' = 08', and since 08' x 0.8 = 06.4', the ayanamsha for 1958 is approximately 23°16'.

Now look at the position of the Moon in your tropical horoscope. Each sign contains 30° of arc. The rule is: **If your Moon's longitude is *greater than* the value of the ayanamsha, it occupies in the sidereal zodiac the constellation with the same name as that sign; if the Moon's longitude is *less than* the value of the ayanamsha, it occupies the immediately previous constellation.** In 1958, therefore, if your Moon's longitude was *greater than* 23°16' it occupies in the sidereal zodiac the constellation with the **same name** as that sign; if its longitude was *less than* 23°16', it occupies the **immediately previous** constellation. If, say, your Moon appears tropically at 27°32' of Libra, it occupies the constellation Libra, because 27°32' is greater than 23°16'. But if it sat at 07°22' of Libra, or at 15°59' or even at 23°15' of that sign, then sidereally it would occupy the constellation immediately previous to Libra, which is

Virgo.

Once you know where your Moon is, you will know that your next Seven-and-a-Half will begin as soon as Saturn enters the constellation that is **immediately previous** to your Moon. If, for example, your Moon occupies Libra, a Seven-and-a-Half will begin for you each time Saturn enters Virgo and will end each time Saturn leaves Scorpio. Table Two contains the dates of Saturn's entry into various constellations of the India's sidereal zodiac over the next several years, according to the Lahiri ayanamsha.

Table Two

Constellation	Saturn's Entry Therein
Pisces	February 16, 1996
Aries	April 17, 1998
Taurus	June 6, 2000
Gemini	April 7, 2003
Cancer	May 25, 2005
Leo	July 16, 2007
Virgo	September 10, 2009
Libra	August 5, 2012
Scorpio	November 2, 2014
Sagittarius	October 26, 2017
Capricorn	January 24, 2020
Aquarius	January 17, 2023
Pisces	March 29, 2025

These dates apply to residents of the Central Time Zone; in other time zones Saturn's entrance may occur on the previous or the following day. The precise time of entrance can be determined from an ephemeris.

Note that in four instances during this period of nearly thirty years Saturn enters a constellation for several months and then retrogrades back into the previous constellation before finally entering the succeeding constellation for good. To wit:

On July 22, 2002 Saturn enters Gemini, on January 7, 2003 he reenters Taurus, and on April 7, 2003 he returns to Gemini.

On September 5, 2004 Saturn enters Cancer, on January 12, 2005 he reenters Gemini, and on May 25, 2005 he returns to Cancer.

On November 15, 2011 Saturn enters Libra, on May 14, 2012 he reenters Virgo, and on August 5, 2012 he returns to Libra.

On January 26, 2017 Saturn enters Sagittarius, on June 19, 2017 he reenters Scorpio, and on October 26, 2017 he returns to Sagittarius.

Technically speaking, a Seven-and-a-Half begins only on those days when Saturn finally and irrevocably enters a particular constitution. When as in these cases he temporarily occupies a constellation, he will provide "advance notice" of the effects that he will eventually produce once he enters that constellation conclusively.

What specifically will happen to you when Saturn passes over your Moon will depend on the conditions and positions of all the planets in your horoscope and particularly on the nature of the constellation your Moon happens to tenant. One school of thought holds that each Seven-and-a-Half delivers its worst troubles during the periods listed in Table Three:

Table Three

If your Moon at birth occupies:	Your worst time will be when Saturn occupies:
Aries	Aries
Taurus	Aries
Gemini	Cancer
Cancer	Cancer or Leo
Leo	Cancer or Leo
Virgo	Leo
Libra	Scorpio
Scorpio	Scorpio or Sagittarius
Sagittarius	All goes well or poorly
Capricorn	Sagittarius or Capricorn
Aquarius	Capricorn
Pisces	Aries

Remember, though, that this is only a general rule, and that you must evaluate your horoscope as a whole before predicting how those seven and a half years will play out in your life.

GLOSSARY & PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

This is a very simplified guide to the pronunciation of a very sophisticated language. The Sanskrit alphabet, which has 49 letters to English's 26, possesses 16 vowels and 33 consonants, among which are numbered four ts, four ds, and three seperate s sounds. After a good deal of soul-searching we have elected to permit ease of use to preempt accuracy of transliteration, and have not here identified any of the variant consonants. We have instead indicated only long and short vowel sounds. In doing so we crave the pardon of all those who know and love Sanskrit.

The vowel sounds are as follows:

a = like the u in 'but'
ā = like the o in 'top'
ai = like the ai in 'aisle'
au = like the ow in 'trowel'
e = like the ey in 'they'
i = like the i in 'fit'
ī = like the ee in 'meet'
o = like the ow in 'grow'
u = like the u in 'true'
ū = like the u in 'rude'

Aditi — "The Unbroken, Unbounded One;" mother of the devas.

Āditya — one of the twelve solar deities who are sons of Adidi.

Agni — god of fire; father (perhaps) of Karttikeya.

Ahalyā — wife of the Muni Gautama.

Akhlakh — the horse on whose back King Vikrama was carried away from Ujjayini.

Akrūra — one of Shri Krishna's kinsmen.

Alolikā — daughter of the merchant of Tamalinda; her necklace was swallowed by a painted swan. She later married King Vikrama.

amrita — the nectar of immortality; sometimes equated with Soma.

Andhaka — "Darkness," a demon created when Parvati playfully covered Shiva's eyes.

Angāraka — the planet Mars, so called because he glows like red-hot coals (angara).

Angiras — a rishi who was born out of live coals; father of the planet Jupiter.

Annapūrnā — Shiva's wife Parvati in Her incarnation as the goddess of food; She is worshipped particularly in Banaras.

Anu — son of Yayati.

Anubhava — experience.

Anugraha — the grace of God (literally, "to follow in grabbing").

apsaras — a dancer in the court of Indra, king of the gods; the beauty of an apsaras is proverbially beyond compare.

Arjuna — the one of the five Pandava brothers who was Shri Krishnas closest human friend. He lived long after Kartavirya Arjuna, a powerful king who once easily defeated Ravana in single combat before being slain by Parashurama.

Aryamā — one of the Adityas.

Ashvins — twin sons of the Aditya Vivasvan, they are physicians to the devas.

asura — a race of celestial beings, sometimes called the "selfish gods"; the asuras vie continuously with the devas for the overlordship of the universe.

Avatāra — a divine incarnation, esp. of Vishnu.

Āyurveda — India's traditional medical system.

Bāla Graha — ethereal beings who afflict susceptible children.

Bali — (literally, "sacrifice"); king of the asuras and grandson of Prahlada, Bali gifted the universe to Vishnu in His incarnation as Vamana.

Banaras — also known as Kashi or Varanasi, it has been continually inhabited longer than ony other city on Earth. It is one of India's holiest cities, being sacred to Shiva, and is said to be the best place on Earth in which to die.

Bhaga — one of the Adityas.

Bhāradvāja — a seer, son of Jupiter by Mamata, the already pregnant wife of his brother Uthya.

Bharata — son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala, he adopted Bharadwaja as his son. India (Bhaāratavarshā) is named for him.

Bhrigu — the rishi, son of Brahma, who was the father of the planet Venus and ancestor of Parashurama.

bhūtas — (literally, "has been"); inauspicious spirits of the dead, and the thought forms which act like them.

Brahmā — Creator of the Cosmos.

Brāhmana —now, a member of India's priestly caste; originally, anyone (regardless of caste) who had achieved personal experience of Absolute Reality.

Brahmarākshasa — an unhappy spirit who had been a misbehaving Brahamana while alive on Earth.

Brihaspati — Vedic deity who came to be identified with the planet Jupiter.

Chāyā — a shadow of Samjna, Vivasvan's wife; Chaya's three children were the planet Saturn, the Progenitor Savarni, and the goddess Tapati.

Daksha — Progenitor who cursed his son-in-law the Moon with consumption and who as Sati's father was slain by Virabhadra.

Damayantī — wife of Nala, from whom she was long separated.

Darshana — means both "philosophy" and "seeing;" during a visit to an Indian temple you have darshana by looking upon that particular Face of God and allowing its image to enter your personal reality.

Dasharathokta Shani Stotra — a famed hymn to Saturn spoken first in our world by King Dasharatha, the father of Shri Ramachandra.

dayā — compassion.

deva — often called gods, the devas are celestial beings who help to maintain order in the cosmos and on Earth. Indra is their king.

Devayānī — daughter of Venus, lover of Kacha, wife of Yayati.

dhairya — staunchness.

Dhananjaya — the protagonist of Annapurna's vrata katha.

Dhanvantari — god of medicine, promulgator of Āyurveda.

Dharma — righteousness, more of less; an inborn faculty of existence, a natural law which affects all embodied beings everywhere in the universe, which makes them what they are and assigns them the roles they are to play in the drama of life.

Dhātā — one of the Adityas.

Dhrūva — "The Firm, Fixed One" = the Pole Star.

Dīpaka — a raga which when properly played or sung will generate fire or heat.

Dīpāvalī — the Festival of Lights, which takes place each October or November.

Diti — "The Bound or Divided One;" mother of the asuras.

Druhyu — son of Yayati.

Durvāsas — the incredibly irritable rishi, brother of the Moon.

Dushyanta — father of Bharata.

Dvāraka — Shri Krishna's capital city.

gandharva — a celestial musician.

Ganesha — the genial elephant-headed god, remover of obstacles; Pārvatī's son.

Gangā — on Earth, the holy river which flows through Banaras; in the firmament, the Milky Way; within the body of a sadhaka, the ethereal vessel (nadi) in which the life force (prana) flows to heat the body and mind.

Garuda — the eagle who is Vishnu's mount.

Gautama — the muni who cursed Indra to be covered with one thousand vaginas after Indra seduced his wife Ahalya.

graha — a thing that grasps; in Jyotish, one of the powerful astral forces which inhabit the corporeal heavenly bodies.

guru — spiritual preceptor. Guru Mahārāj and Gurujī are polite forms of address for a guru.

Hanuman — the monkey-god who helped Shri Ramachandra in His fight against Ravana.

Harishchandra — king noted for his truthfulness.

Ikshvāku — the oldest of the ten sons of Vaivasvata, he emerged from his father's nose during a sneeze. Ikshvaku who founded the solar race of human kings, of whom Shri Ramachandra was the most illustrious scion.

Īlā — daughter/son of Vaivasvata and Shraddha, mother of Pururavas.

Indra — king of the devas.

Jamadagni — the rishi who was Parashuram's father.

Jāmbavan — the powerful bear who helped Shri Ramachandra regain Sita; he returned the Syamantaka gem to Shri Krishna.

Jāmbavatī — Jambavan's daughter, and one of Shri Krishna's principal wives.

Jayantī — Indra's daughter and, for ten years, wife of Venus.

Jyotir Vidyā — the goddess who embodies the living wisdom of Jyotish.

Jyotish (or Jyotisha) — India's traditional system of astrology.

jyotishi — a practitioner of Jyotish.

Kac̣ha — Jupiter's son who stole the Sanjivani Vidya for the devas.

Karma — any action with which you identify yourself as the doer; your every karmic action produces a reaction which you must eventually experience.

Kārtikeya — son of Agni (or perhaps of Shiva); also known as Skanda, and sometimes equated with the planet Mars.

Kashyapa — the rishi who was husband to Diti and Aditi; father of Vamana.

Kauravas — the one hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra, whose intransigence toward their cousins the Pandavas led to the great war of the Mahabharata.

Ketu — the South Node of the Moon; Ketu and Rāhu are the two points in the sky where the moon's orbit around earth and the plane of the earth's orbit around the sun intersect. Eclipses occur at these points.

kīrtankar — a professional storyteller who usually includes music in his or her performances.

Krishna — also Shri Krishna or Lord Krishna; the eighth of Vishnu's ten pricipal avatāras, who spoke the Bhagavad Gītā to Arjuna before the commencement of the Mahābhārata war.

Kritavarma — one of Shri Krishna's kinsmen.

kshamā — forebearance.

Kshatriya — a member of India's warrior caste.

Lakshmana — the one of Shri Ramachandra's brothers who accompanied Him on His wanderings in the wilderness.

Lakshmī — goddess of prosperity; Vishnu's wife.

Lankā — the capital city of Ravana, who abducted Shri Ramachandra's wife Sita.

Mahābhārata — one of India's two great epics, it is principally the story of the struggle for supremacy between two groups of cousins, the Dauravas and Pandavas, in which Shri Krisha figures prominently.

māhātmya — "particular greatness"; a chronicle of something's greatness and an appreciation of that chronicle's own greatness.

Mamatā — "Motheriness;" mother of Bharadwaja.

Mandhata — emperor of whom the Rishi Vasistha told the story of King Nimi.

Mangala — the planet Mars.

Manu — a progenitor; the being who is entrusted with the task of creating humans during a period of many millions of years known as a Manvantara.

Marīchī — rishi; father of Kashyapa Rishi

Mathurendra — king of Mathura in one version of the story of King Vikramaditya's sade sati.

Matsyagandhā — "Fish-Odor;" Parashara Rishi mated with her to create the Rishi Veda Vyasa.

Meghanāda — most important of Ravana's sons.

Menakā — famous apsaras, mother of Shakuntala.

Meru — the mountain upon which the universe is founded.

Mithilā — King Nimi's kingdom, now part of the Indian state of Bihar.

Mitra — one of the Adityas.

Mohinī — "the Enchantress;" Vishnu disguised as the most beautiful woman ever seen in the universe.

Mūla Mantra — the general or root (mula) mantra for a deity; it can freely be spoken aloud.

Muni — an immortal seer who ranks in power just below a rishi.

Mushkil Gushā — in the Middle East, Friend of Man and Remover of All Difficulties.

nādī — the celestial conduits in which flow the Pravaha Vayu. In the human body, the nadis are ethereal vessels (much like the meridians of acupuncture) through which the life force (Sanskrit prana, Chiniese ch'i) flows.

nakshatra — one of the 27 or 28 Vedic constellations.

Nala — king, husband of Damayanti.

Nārada — the Divine Busybody.

Narasimha — the Man-Lion; Vishnu's foruth avatara, who appeared to save Prahlada from his father, the asura Hiranyakashipu.

Nārāyana — "Lord of All," the Supreme Lord of the cosmos. Sūrya Nārāyana is this Supreme Lord worshipped through the medium of the Sun.

Nimi — famous king who was overthrown after angering the planet Mercury.

Padmasena — King Chandrasena's daughter, she later married King Vikrama.

Pāndavas — five sons of King Pandu, of whom Arjuna is the best known; they fought their cousins the Dauravas in the great war of the Mahabharata.

paramātmā — "Supreme Soul"; the Ultimate Reality.

Parāshara — one of the fathers of modern Jyotish, and through Matsyagandha father of the Rishi Veda Vyasa, who composed many Sanskrit classics including the Mahabharata epic.

Parashurāma — "Rama-with-the-Axe," Vishnu's sixth avatara. A Brahmana who was descended from the Rishi Bhrigu, He repeatedly exterminated the world's Kshatriyas after King Kartavirya Arjuna killed His father Jamadagni.

parijātaka — *Nyctanthes arbor-tristes*; a variety of jasmine said to have been brought down to Earth from the celestial realms by Shri Krishna.

Pārvatī — the Great goddess in Her incarnation as wife of Lord Shiva.

pashchātkarma — "post-action"; the activities performed after cathartic purification which help bring the organism back into harmony.

pippala — *Ficus religiosa*; the tree in which Saturn sits hidden in some stories. Pippala trees are commonly believed to house many types of etherial beings; the Bodhi Tree, under which Gautama Buddha became enlightened, was a pippala tree.

Pippalāda — the seer who was said in one myth to have broken both Saturn's legs, after which Saturn became known as Manda ("the Slow").

pradhānakarma — "principal action"; the purifying activity which brings catharsis.

Prahlāda — King Bali's grandfather, to whom Vishnu apperared in the Narasimha (Man-Lion) Avatara.

Pralaya — the time when the manifested universe returns to non-manifestation.

prāna — the ch'i of Chiniese medicine; prana is the vital force which causes the inert assemblage of tissues known as the body to live, and causes body, mind and spirit to be strung togehter like pearls on a string.

prasāda — consecrated worship material which is distributed at the end of a vrata katha. It is usually one of the foods ruled by the graha in question, but when those are unavailable anything sweet can be used instead.

Prasenajit — Satrajit's brother, he was killed when he wore the Syamantaka gem in an impure state.

Pravaha Vāyu — the celestial "wind" which, under the control of the sun and the moon, controls the evaporation and precipitation of water from the earth.

Purāna — pura hi anati idam, "this breathes from former times;" one of the compendia of re-conceptualized Vedic wisdom said to have been authored by the Rishi Veda Vyasa.

Puru — son of Yayati, ancestor of Bharata.

Purūravas — son of Mercury, husband of Urvashi, divider of the Vedas and the sacred fire into three parts.

purusha — "Soul"; the Absolute Reality.

pūrvakarma — "pre-action"; the preliminaries which prepare an individual for purification.

Pūshan — one of the Adityas.

rāga (fem. ragini) — a mode or progression of notes with which an Indian musician creates a mood, which ideally culminates in emotional catharsis.

Rāhu — the North Node of the Moon; Rahu and Ketu are the two points in the sky where the plane of the moon's orbit around Earth and the plane of the earth's orbit around the sun intersect. Eclipses occur at these points.

rājābhisheka — the anointment ceremony during which a king is suffused with "kingliness," to make him fit to reign.

Rāmachandra — the seventh of Vishnu's ten principal avatara, often called Shri Rāmachandra, Lord Rama, or simply Rāma, He is the hero of the Ramayana.

Rāmāyana — one of India's two great epics, it is the story of Shri Ramachandra's life, including particularly His invasion of Lanka, with the help of Hanuman and Lakshmana, to retrieve His wife Sita from Ravana.

Rāvana — ("the Howler"); the demon-king of Lanka whose kidnapping of Sita led to his death.

rishi — a seer; one of the sages who "saw," or perceived, the hymns of the Vedas.

sāde sātī (in Gujarati, panoti) — Hindi for Seven-and-a-Half, your sade sati is the period of approximately seven and one-half years during which Saturn moves through the constellation which holds the Moon and the two constellations which flank it.

sādhana — spiritual practices which help create better alignment between an individual and the cosmos.

sādhu — an itinerant practitioner of sadhana.

Samjnā — wife of the Aditya Vivasvan.

Sanjīvanī Vidyā — a vidya which can resuscitate the dead.

Santoshi Mā — a popular goddess whose cult developed primarily as a result of the dramatic success of a Hindi film dedicated to her miracles.

Sārang — one of the horses King Vikrama considered purchasing.

Satī — "The True One;" Shiva's wife in Her incarnation as daughter of Daksha. Later reborn as Parvati.

Satrajit — obtained the Syamantaka gem from the Sun, but first lost it through his brother Prasenajit and after regaining it was murdered for it by Shatadhanva.

satya — truthfulness.

Satyabhāmā — daughter of Satrajit; one of Shri Krishna's principal wives.

Sāvarni — a manu, son of Vivasvan.

Sāvitrī — one of the Adityas.

Shakra — one of the Adityas; also, a name for Indra.

Shakuntalā — daughter of the Apsaras Menaka and the Rishi Vishvamitra; mother of Bharata.

Shani — the planet Saturn. Shani is the planet in charge of fate, which forces you to experience your karmas whether you want to or not.

Sharmishthā — daughter of King Vrishaparvan of the asuras; unwilling serving maid of Devayani; illicit lover of Yayati.

Shatadhanvā — murdered Shatrajit for the Syamantaka gem.

Shiva — Destroyer of the Cosmos, Lord of Yoga, Embodiment of Supreme Unqualified Consciousness; Husband of Sati and Parvati.

Shraddhā — wife of Vaivasvata, mother of Ila/Sudyamna.

Shrāvana — lunar month that is sacred to Shiva, it falls in August-September.

Shrī — "auspicious;" name of a raga, title for the eminent (like Rama and Krishna), and and epithet of Laksmi, goddess of prosperity.

Shukra — the planet Venus; semen; the color white.

Sītā — Shri Ramachandra's wife.

Skanda — son of Shiva (or perhaps of Agni); also known as Karttikeya, and sometimes equated with the planet Mars.

soma — the divinely intoxicating beverage of the Vedas; sometimes equated with the Moon, and sometimes with amrita.

Srīmad Bhāgavata — the greatest among the Puranas, it tells the story of Shri Krishna.

Sudāma — one of Shri Krishna's schoolmates who lost his luck when he cheated Krishna out of some food, and many years later regained good fortune in his life after journeying to obtain a blessing from Shri Krishna.

Sudyumna — Ila in her male form.

Sulakshanā — "Good Sign"; wife of the protagonist of Annapurna's vrata katha.

svabhāva — your "innate nature," which determines how you experience the world. Saturn can no longer affect you once you have completely conquered your svabhava.

Syamantaka — the fabulous gem gifted by the Sun to Satrajit.

Tāmalindā — the city in which King Vikŕama was falsely accused of theft.

Tantra — a religion of ritual which developed as one offshoot from India's Vedic roots.

Tapatī — Vivasvan's daughter by Chaya; Tapati later became a river on Earth.

Tārā — Jupiter's wife; tara or taraka also means "a star," and a vikeshi taraka ("hair-like star") is a comet.

Tārāmatī —wife of King Harischandra.

Trishanku —hapless king who hangs upside down in the middle of the sky.

Tvashtri — an Aditya; the celestial archtiect who is also known as Vishvakarman ("Master Builder of the Cosmos").

Turvasu — son of Yayati.

Ujjayinī — the modern Ujjain, it was King Vikramaditya's capital city. Ancient India's prime meridian was located in Ujjayini, which is one of India's seven holiest cities.

upāya — an astrological remedy.

Urūkrama — one of the Adityas.

Urvashī — the apsaras who became the wife of Pururavas.

Ushanas — Vedic deity who came to be identified with the planet Venus.

vaibhava — glory.

Vaikuntha — Vishnu's paradise.

Vaivasvata — a manu, son of Vivasvat; father of Ila/Sudyumna.

Vāmana — Vishnu's fifth avatara, the divine dwarf who begged the universe back from King Bali.

Varuna — one of the Adityas; also, Lord of the Waters.

Vasishtha — influential rishi, one of the Seven Sages.

Vasudeva — Shri Krisha's biological father; Shri Krishna himself is known as *Vasudeva.*

Vāsuki — the great serpent who helped to churn the Ocean of Milk.

Vedas — India's four ancient sacred book-length accumulations of living wisdom.

Vidhātā — one of the Adityas; also, a name for the god of fate.

vidyā — the accumulated living wisdom of a subject such as Ayurveda or Jyotish which incarnates as goddess.

vigraha — an iconic image, a "form which enables the mind to grasp the nature of God." The Faces of God are all vigrahas.

Vikramaditya — "He Who Possesses the Valor of the Sun" or "The Sun of Bravery" or "The Sun of Great Deeds;" in short form, Vikrama.

vīras — the "heroic spirits" who work for King Vikrama in some versions of his stories.

Vīrabhadra — "The Auspicious Hero"; created by Shiva to destroy Daksha's sacrifice, Virabhadra later became fever in the world.

Vishnu — Preserver of the cosmos who sends avataras down to earth to protect the righteous in times of great unrighteousness.

Vishvāchī — apsaras whose beauty bewitched the young Venus.

Vishvāmitra — powerful rishi, rival of Vasistha; father of Shakuntala.

Vishvarūpa — son of the celestial architect Tvashtri and his wife Rachana; temporary guru of Indra, who slew him one day in a fit of rage.

Vivasvan — "The Shining One"; one of the Adityas who fathered Vaivasvata, yama, Yami, and the Ashvin twins on his wife Samjna, and Saturn, Savarnī, and Tapati on her shadow Chaya.

vrata kathā — a sacred story recited in the context of a vow.

Vrishaparvan — king of the asuras, father of Sharmishtha.

Vritra — the gargantuan demon created by Tvashtri to revenge his son Vishvarupa's death.

Yādava — the clan to which Shri Krishna belonged.

Yama — son of Vivasvan and Chaya, Lord of Dharma, he takes away the souls of those whose life span is at an end.

Yamī — Yama's sister.

Yamunā — on Earth, the holy river which flows through mathura and Vrindavana on its way to join the Ganga at Prayaga (the modern Allahabad); within the body of a sadhaka, the ethereal vessel (nadi) in which the life force (prana) flows to cool the body and mind.

Yadu — son of Yayati, ancestor of Kartavirya Arjuna.

Yayāti — husband of Devayani, the daughter of Venus, Yayati was cursed by his father-in-law with premature old age for fathering children on Sharmishtha.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aiyer, V.A.K. (translator), *Simhasana Dwatrimsika* (Thirty-Two Tales of the Throne), 6th edition, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1988

Alper, Harvey P. ed, *Understanding Mantra*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1989)

Bhat, Prof M. Ramakrishna, *Brhat Samhita*, Motilal Banarśidas, Delhi, 1981

Bhishagratna, Kaviraj Kunjalal, trans. and ed., *The Sushruta Samhita*, three vols, Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1991

Bonazzoli, Giorgio, "Seduction Stories in the Brahmavaivarta Purana," *Purana*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, July 1977, pp. 321-341

Burgess, Rev. Ebenezer (translator), *Surya Siddhanta*, ed P. Gangooly, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1989

Campbell, Joseph, *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, Harper & Row, New York, 1986

Campbell, Joseph, *Myths to Live By*, Bantam, New York, 1972

Coburn, Thomas B., *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of its Interpretation*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991

de Fouw, Hart and Svoboda, Robert, *Light on Life: An Introduction to Indian Astrology*, London, Penguin, 1996 de Santillana, Giorgio and von Dechend, Hertha, *Hamlet's Mill*, David R. Godine, Boston, 1977

Dossey, Larry, *Healing Words*, Harper Collins, New York, 1993

Eck, Diana L., Darsan: *Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 2nd edition, Chambersburg, PA, Anima Books, 1985

Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1987

Erndl, Kathleen M., *Victory to the Mother*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993.

Ghosh, Ekendranath, *Studies on Rigvedic Deities: Astronomical and Meteorological*, Cosmo, New Delhi, 1983

Gonda, Jan, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, (date unknown)

Graham, William A., *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1987

Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, Noonday Press, New York, amended and enlarged edition, 1966

Greene, Liz, *Saturn: A New Look at an Old Devil*, Samuel Weiser, York Beach, ME, 1976

Guenon, Rene, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, Munshiram Manorharlal, New Delhi, 1993

Gupta, Sanjukta and Gombrich, Richard, "Kings, Power and the Goddess," *South Asia Research*, Vol. 6, No. 2, November 1986

Hartner, Willy, "The Pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon's Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies," Ars Islamica, 1938, vol. 5, pp. 113-154

Kapoor, G.S. (translator), *Phaladeepika*, Ranjan, Delhi, 1991

Krupp, E.C., *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, Harper Collins, New York, 1991

Knipe, David, "Softening the Cruelty of God: Folklore, Ritual, and the Planet Sani (Saturn) in Southeast India," in *Syllables of Sky: Studies in South Indian Civilization*, ed. David Shulman, Oxford University Press, forthcoming

Swami Madhavananda (translator), *The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 6th edition, not dated

Moore, Thomas, *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino*, Lindisfarne Press, Great Barrington, MA, 1990 Edition

Mukherji, Kali Nath, *Popular Hindu Astronomy*, reprinted by Nirmal Mukherjea, Calcutta,1969

O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva*, Oxford University Press, London, 1973

O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths*, Penguin, London, 1975

Pandey, Ramchandra, "Elements of Astrology in the Vamana Purana," *Purana*, Vol XII, No. 1, pp. 65-81, January 1970

Raghunathan, N. (translator), *Srimad Bhagavata*, Vighneswara Publishing House, Madras, 1976

Ramanujan, A. K., "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," from *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, eds. Blackburn and Ramanujan, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986

Ramanujan, A. K. (editor), *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages*, Viking India, New Delhi, 1991

Rushdi, Salman, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Granta, Cambridge, 1990.

Santhanam, R. (translator), *Brihat Parashara Hora Shastra of Maharishi Parasara*, Ranjan, Delhi, Vol. I 1984, Vol. II 1988

Santhanam, R. (translator), *Saravali of Kalyana Verma*, Ranjan, Delhi, 2 vols, 1983

Saraswathy, K.N. and Ardhanareeswaran, B., *Navagrahas or Nine Planets*, Kadalangudi House, Madras, 1978

Shah, Idries (collector), *World Tales*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1979

Somadeva, *Vetala Panchavimshati*, anonymous translator, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1964

Subramanya Sastri, V., *Jataka Parijata*, Ranjan Publications, New Delhi, not dated

Swami Tapasananda (translator), *Srimad Bhagavata*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1980

Swami Tapasyananda (translator), *Valmiki Ramayana: Sundara Kanda*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983

Thompson, Richard L., *Vedic Cosmography and Astronomy*, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Los Angeles, 1989

Van Buitenen, J.A.B., "Dharma and Moksa," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol VII, Nos. 1 & 2, April, July 1957, 33-40

Van Buitenen, J.A.B. (translator), *Tales of Ancient India*, Bantam, New York, 1961

Winternitz, M., *History of Indian Literature, Vol I*, tr. Mrs. S. Ketkar, Russell & Russell, New York, reprinted 1971

"Dr. Svoboda nourishes the spiritual imagination of his readers by immersing them in the powerful, transformative universe of India's mythic vision. From within the horizon of ancient Hindu astrology, he enables us to engage vital issues of life and fate, love and conflict, success and defeat in newly liberating ways. No writer today presents the heart of this profound tradition with more authenticity. Highly recommended for anyone seeking to integrate spirituality with the complexities of everyday living."
Lance E. Nelson, Ph.D., Department of Religious Studies, University of San Diego

"Dr. Svoboda has captured the essence—an easily readable narrative of India's best known Saturn tale... and a discussion of age-old strategies for modifying Saturn's influence."
Frederick M. Smith, Ph.D., University of Iowa

In *The Greatness of Saturn* experience directly the healing power of one of the world's great myths.

The telling of mythic stories has always been a powerful form of therapy, bringing healing to people facing adversity. *The Greatness of Saturn* is such a therapeutic myth, told and retold through many centuries. Taken from the East Indian Vedic tradition, it honors the planet Saturn, who personifies time, limitation, loss, and all forms of adversity.

No person goes through life without sometime being touched by Saturn. This book presents a classic Saturn story, and a clear view of the cosmology from which the story came. As we hear the story and come to understand its context, we experience a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

Dr. Robert E. Svoboda is the only Westerner licensed to practice Ayurvedic medicine in India. A native of Texas, he is the author of eight books on Ayurveda and Indian mythology.

Dr. Svoboda is a board and faculty member of the Ayurvedic Institute, Albuquerque, N.M.

Rupa & Co

ISBN 1-57178-032-7

9 781571 780324

Rs. 195

Cover Design & Illustration: Arrt Creations